

HOW DO CHRISTIAN STUDENT TEACHERS VIEW THEIR ROLE IN DELIVERING RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND SCHOOLS?

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BARBARA MCDADE

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Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all. - Aristotle

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ABSTRACT

An investigation into the views of Christian student teachers concerning their role in the delivery of Religious Education. The Northern Ireland school system and Core RE Curriculum are examined. Students were surveyed prior to and following a seminar series on teaching and Christian vocation. Topics included the relationship between teaching and Christian worldview, Christian vocation, Biblical models of teaching and the integration of Christian practices in teaching. Focus groups allowed the participants to discuss the material presented and share their views and opinions, with a number of outcomes identified concerning the training needs of students in relation Religious Education.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND THE SETTING

The Social and Cultural Context of Religious Education in Northern Ireland and Emerging Generation Students

Introduction

Over the last twenty years Northern Ireland has undergone a period of rapid political and social change. The 'Peace Process', which saw an end to decades long violence, brought political stability and increased security resulting in significant cultural, social and economic benefits. As the country has stabilised, some of the old divisions have fallen away and people have gained a new sense of identity and freedom. Millennials and subsequent generations,¹ who were born around the time of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 or since, have grown up in a largely peaceful and stable society.² As a result, they have more freedom and greater opportunities than the generations that have gone before them.

At the same time as these massive political changes have been taking place within Northern Ireland, postmodernism has changed the social and cultural landscape in much of the West. The modern era which was characterised by concrete worldviews and shared metanarratives, is past. The late twentieth and early twenty first century, have seen major cultural and intellectual shifts as postmodernism has continued to take root in western societies.

The grand metanarrative of the Christian faith, upon which most modern European states were built, has been swept aside, replaced by systems of thought founded on relativity

¹ Jeffery Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006), 11.

² The Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998 as a peace settlement between the British and Irish Governments as to how Northern Ireland was to be governed. The GFA brought to an end over thirty years of violent conflict in which over 3,600 were murdered.

and subjective truth. Confidence has been replaced by confusion and clarity with chaos. The presuppositions upon which most societies or communities were built, have been excavated, leaving behind large voids into which people pour their lives, without the reassurance of a firm foundation upon which to stand.

Lyotard defines postmodern 'as incredulity toward metanarratives.'³ Stanley Grenz asserts that 'this phenomenon marks the end of a single, universal worldview.'⁴ Truth is viewed as subjective, a construct of language that people use, and the community in which they are located. Everything is open to interpretation, power has shifted away from institutions to the individual. The impact of this change has far reaching implications for the development of emerging generation student teachers, the education systems within which they work and the pupils they teach.

In the midst of these profound changes and an increasingly secular Northern Ireland, emerging generation student teachers are faced with many challenges, perhaps the greatest of which is finding their own sense of identity and purpose in life. In preparing the next generation of teachers to enter the classroom, it is vital to understand the impact that postmodernism and changing patterns of human development are having on emerging generation students.

Ivy Beckwith states "post moderns believe there is no overarching truth or ultimate ideal that explains and undergirds all of human existence."⁵ Even those with a strong Christian commitment, may be reluctant to talk about the truth claims of Christianity. This means that their views of religious education in schools and their role in delivering it, will be quite different

³ Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), 24.

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 11-12.

⁵ Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 22.

to the generations of Christian teachers who have gone before them. Growing up in a postmodern environment impacts upon their own identity, faith formation and understanding of vocation, all of which are being shaped by the prevailing culture.

For Christian students, excited by the opportunity to be an effective witness for Christ in the classroom, the context in which they will deliver religious education is also shaped by the prevailing culture. In the past, it was largely accepted that schools and teachers play an important role in the religious education of young people, but this is no longer universally accepted. Student teachers find that their peers and pupils, are much less knowledgeable or accepting of Christianity than previous generations and the relationship between communities, parents and churches has been significantly altered.

Once at the centre of most civic institutions in Ulster, the churches now find themselves increasingly pushed towards the margins of society. An increasing number of people question if the religious education curriculum set by the churches to be taught in Northern Ireland's schools should continue to deliver solely Christian education to pupils.⁶ Yet despite the questions, legally and practically, many teachers still play a significant role in the faith development of children and young people whilst they are in school.

Christian students completing their teacher training at Stranmillis University College, often express concerns about their ability to articulate their faith in the classroom and fear a growing sense of a hostility towards Christianity in schools. Currently, they have limited opportunities to consider how their faith relates to being a teacher, how it might shape and

⁶ Tom Butler, *Religion and Public Life: Thoughts for The Day* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 2.

influence their classroom practice or how understanding teaching as an expression of their Christian vocation can make a difference to their sense of professional fulfilment and purpose.

The key challenges are not simply that they lack opportunities to explore these issues whilst undertaking their teaching training, but that their own understanding of Christianity has been profoundly influenced by the postmodern culture in which they have grown up. The impact of postmodernism means that very few young adults hold or are able to articulate a Christian worldview. Their epistemology is likely to be less fixed than previous generations and everything is up for grabs. Christian Smith has described them as follows:

Most emerging adults functionally (meaning how they actually think and act, regardless of the theories they hold) are soft ontological antirealists and epistemological sceptics and perspectivalists...they are de facto doubtful that an identifiable, objective, shared reality might exist across and around all people that can serve as a reliable reference point for rational deliberation and argument.⁷

This can leave students feeling very unsure about the truth claims of Christ at both an intellectual and social level. As Smith's research shows, even committed traditionalists often fail to recognise the universal nature of the Gospel and the power of postmodernism is so great that Christian students may be reluctant to embrace the opportunities the NI Curriculum and law affords them in relation to sharing the Christian faith with the pupils in their classroom.⁸

Social, Cultural and Religious Landscape of Northern Ireland

The United Kingdom, like many other western societies is now regularly described as post-Christian. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Williams has said that "while Britain's

⁷ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

⁸ Department of Education NI, *Religious Education Core Curriculum*, accessed June 30, 2017, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/religious-education-core-syllabus-english-version.pdf> (United Kingdom).

cultural memory is still quite strongly Christian, it is post-Christian in terms of practice.”⁹ Whilst Northern Ireland has not been immune from the social and cultural changes associated with postmodernism, some commentators, including Dr. Kenneth Milne,¹⁰ have noted at a societal level the impact has not been as pervasive as in other parts of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is in many ways more religious and socially conservative than other parts of the UK. For example, it is the only jurisdiction within the UK in which same sex marriage and abortion are illegal, and in the most recent UK census 2011 the population identifying as Christian in Northern Ireland was 82.3%, whilst it was just 59.4% in England; 53.8% in Scotland and 57.6% in Wales.¹¹

Northern Ireland Education System

The education system in Northern Ireland retains a strong emphasis on Christianity within the curriculum. A daily act of collective worship (assembly) is a legal requirement within all schools, and Christian clergy have the legal right to participate in assemblies and deliver Religious Education (RE) lessons in their local school.

Despite having an agreed legal framework which allows for the promotion of the Christian faith in all schools, Northern Ireland with a population of just 1.8 million has a very complex and fragmented education system, reflecting the religious divisions within wider society. The school system is predominantly public with very few private schools. There are five

⁹ Rowan Williams “Britain is now Post Christian,” *Guardian*, April 27, 2014, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/27/britain-post-christian-says-rowan-williams>.

¹⁰ Kenneth Milne, “*Religion in the public square: a personal paper submitted to the Church Action on Labour and Life*” (Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches), accessed May 3, 2017, <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Information/Resources/CCU/call2010.pdf>.

¹¹ 2011 Census (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2016).

types of public schools: (1) Controlled (2) Maintained (3) Voluntary (4) Integrated and (5) Irish medium. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. School Types in Northern Ireland

Sector	% of pupils	Phase	Overview
<i>Controlled</i>	38%	Nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special	Provided and managed by the Education Authority through board of Governors, including transferor's members (Protestant Churches) Additional controlled integrated schools (further 2% of pupils)
<i>Maintained</i>	35%	Nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special	Roman Catholic ethos Board of Governors including trustees appointed by CCMS
<i>Voluntary</i>	15%	Grammar	Self-governing, locally appointed Board of Governors reflecting community make up
<i>Integrated</i>	5%	Nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special	Educate Protestant and Catholic children together Self-governing, supported by NICIE
<i>Other</i>	1%	Nursery, primary, secondary, and special	Mostly Irish-medium

Source: Department of Education 2016¹²

The figures show that the majority of children attend schools that are Maintained 35% (mainly attended by Catholic children) or Controlled 38% (mainly attended by Protestant children). All the school types shown in Table 1 above are termed 'grant-aided' meaning they receive government funding.

In 1981 the first integrated school, Lagan College was established. It seeks to educate Protestant and Catholic together children together, with Religious Education being delivered through a joint Chaplaincy, employing one Protestant and one Catholic Chaplain/RE teacher.

¹² Department of Education NI, "School Enrolments – School Level Data 2015/16," accessed February 17, 2017, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-enrolments-school-level-data-201516>.

This innovative and forward-looking school acted as a catalyst for the establishment of a further 62 Integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Each Integrated school seeks to maintain a balance of pupils, 40% Catholics and 40% Protestants, plus 20% of those from other faiths and none. Sadly, more than thirty years after Lagan College was founded at the height of the Troubles,¹³ only 7% of the school population are educated in an Integrated School.

Each school type is supported by a statutory sectorial body, also in receipt of government funding. These publically funded bodies are responsible for ensuring the ethos and values of the different types of schools are protected. Statements concerning the place of Christianity within the two largest sectorial groupings i.e. Maintained and Controlled schools, alongside Integrated schools will be briefly highlighted to demonstrate the significance which is still being placed on schools as places in which children have the opportunity to be exposed to Christian teaching and worship.

Catholic Schools are overseen by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) which states:

Education is, in a very special way, the concern of the Church, not only because the Church must be recognised as a human society capable of imparting education, but especially because it has the duty of proclaiming the way of salvation to all, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and of assisting them with continual care so that they may be able to attain to the fullness of that life. The Church, as a mother, is obliged to provide for its children an education in virtue of which their whole lives may be inspired by the spirit of Christ. At the same time, it will offer its help to all peoples for the promotion of the well-balanced development of the human person, for the good of society in this world and for the development of a more human world.¹⁴

This clearly underlines the vital role that the Catholic Church believes schools play in passing the faith onto children and young people.

¹³ Between 1968-1998, the conflict in Northern Ireland during the late 20th century is known as the Troubles. Over 3,600 people were killed and thousands more injured.

¹⁴ Vatican II, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.

Integrated Schools are managed by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE). In the past they have been accused of pushing a liberal agenda, in the Newsletter (January 11, 2014), Rev Ian Paisley accused the organisation of being 'a front for the secular lobby.'¹⁵ However, on their website they state their position as follows:

It is important to note that Integrated schools are not secular but are essentially Christian in character and welcome all faiths and none. In Integrated Primary Schools Catholic children are offered Sacramental preparation at P4 and P7. At the same time, Protestant children can generally avail of the Delving Deeper programme to develop their own faith knowledge.

Controlled Schools until last year had no statutory body responsible for looking after their needs. The Council for Controlled Schools, was formally established on 1st September 2016, following years of lobbying by the three largest Protestant churches (Presbyterian Church in Ireland; Methodist Church in Ireland and Church of Ireland) through the Transferor's Representative Council (TRC). The churches felt that Controlled schools, predominantly attended by Protestant children, were not being well or fairly represented within the Department of Education structures, whereas Catholic Maintained schools had enjoyed the benefits of having the CCMS looking after their interests since 1981.

The majority of Stranmillis graduates go on to serve as teachers in the Controlled sector. The CSSC offices are located on the Stranmillis University College campus and strong links are already being forged between Stranmillis and CSSC. Staff are working together in a number of policy areas, including work on ethos and values, collective worship and RE. The new Chief Executive of CSSC recently described the organisation as a 'non-denominational, Christian grouping of schools, but open to all faiths and none.'¹⁶

¹⁵ Rev Ian Paisley, interview, *Newsletter*, January 11, 2014.

¹⁶ Kevin O'Sullivan, "New CSSC Body," *Irish Times*, 11 March, 2017, accessed June 13, 2017 <http://www.irishnews.com/news/2017/03/11/news/controlled-schools-body-appoints-first-directors-960526>.

Given that this new body was set up as recently as September 2016, it seems, within education at least, that Northern Ireland cannot yet be considered a post-Christendom society. There is still a willingness on behalf of the government to recognise and support faith-based schooling and acknowledge the role schools play in the Christian education of children and young people.

Historical Context

Immediately following the Second World War the UK government introduced legislation that required all schools to introduce a daily act of collective worship in England and Wales, through the 1944 Education Act. Similar legislation followed in Northern Ireland with the Education Act 1947. At that moment in history, there arose “contemporaneous needs of Church and State: the wish to revive and secure the place of Christianity in the life of the country, and the need to ensure the nation’s future well-being at a time when a war was being fought in Europe and beyond.”¹⁷ Freathy and Parker note that during the parliamentary passage of the 1944 Act,

The Second World War was frequently portrayed by British clerics and politicians as a spiritual and moral crisis threatening the Christian foundations of civilisation, freedom and democracy. Such rhetoric was repeatedly coupled with an assertion that Britain’s social and political tradition and values could only endure the threat of idolatrous totalitarianism abroad and pre-war trends towards faithlessness at home if the nation’s Christian identity was reinforced and reinvigorated.¹⁸

¹⁷ Archbishop of Canterbury, HL Deb 18 July 1944, vol. 132, cc 950-82, 972.

¹⁸ Rob Freathy and Stephen Parker, “Freedom from Religious Beliefs: Humanists and Religious Education in England in the 1960’s and 70’s,” in *Religious Education and Freedom of Religion and Belief*, ed. Rob Freathy and Stephen Parker (Whitney, GB: Peter Lang Ltd, 2012) 223.

The concurrent needs of Church and State came together, leading to the introduction of the statutory requirement of collective school worship, which in Northern Ireland's case remains in place.

Contemporary Context

Religious education (RE) is a compulsory part of the Northern Ireland curriculum. The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, Articles 21-22 (as amended) affirmed the position taken in the earlier legislation by requiring that the school day in every grant-aided school must 'include collective worship whether in one or more than one assembly'. In Controlled schools (which have traditionally served the Protestant community) the nature of the worship must 'not be distinctive of any particular religious denomination'. In Catholic Maintained and most Integrated schools, sacramental preparation is also part of the curriculum.

Parents have the right to withdraw their child from part or all RE and / or collective worship. However, there is no independent right of withdrawal available to pupils, which means that whilst fewer children and young people choose to attend church, they are required to participate in RE lessons and collective worship at school. It is therefore important to recognise the key role that teachers play in teaching children about God, His church and Christian moral values /ethics.

The RE Curriculum

In 1993, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DENI) formally adopted a 'Core Syllabus for Religious Education.'¹⁹ Despite the different types of schools, a joint syllabus was agreed by the four largest Christian denominations - the Catholic Church in Ireland, the

¹⁹ Department of Education NI, *Religious Education Core Syllabus*, accessed January 15, 2017, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/religious-education-core-syllabus>.

Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church of Ireland (Anglican) and the Methodist Church in Ireland and approved by the Department of Education. The Core Syllabus is exclusively Christian and contains three main elements: 1) The Revelation of God (teaching about God, the Bible and the life and teaching of Jesus); 2) The Christian Church (from its New Testament origins to the present day); and 3) Christian Morality (respect for God, self, others, and the environment). There is an additional element, 4) World Religions, which typically involves teaching about Judaism and Islam in order to develop knowledge of and sensitivity towards, the religious beliefs, practices and lifestyles of people from other religions in Northern Ireland. This element of the curriculum is only required at Key stage 3 (11-14 year olds), motivated by a desire amongst the churches to ensure children receiving a grounding in the Christian faith before learning about other faiths. In addition to the core syllabus, Catholic Maintained schools are permitted to provide confessional teaching in preparation for the sacraments as religious education is broadly viewed as a partnership between the home, the parish and the school.

Schools are required to provide RE as described in the core syllabus, outlined below in Table 2. This means that by law, all children and young people in Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4 (ages 4 – 16) must be taught key Christian teachings about God, Jesus, the Bible, the Church, worship, prayer, ethics and morality. The full curriculum can be found in Appendix 1. In Primary Schools (4-11 year olds) RE is delivered by all class teachers. In Post Primary Schools (11-18 year olds) it is usually taught by subject specialists, although many Christian teachers without formal training are asked to deliver religious education as part of their timetable.

Table 2. Religious Education Core Curriculum, Northern Ireland

Topics	Learning Outcomes
Revelation of God	Pupils should develop an awareness, knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the key Christian teachings about God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), about Jesus Christ and about the Bible; and develop an ability to interpret and relate the Bible to life.

Table 2. Religious Education Core Curriculum, Northern Ireland (continued)

The Christian Church	Pupils should develop a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the growth of Christianity, of its worship, prayer and religious language; a growing awareness of the meaning of belonging to a Christian tradition, and sensitivity towards the beliefs of others.
Morality	Pupils should develop their ability to think and judge about morality, to relate Christian moral principles to personal and social life, and to identify values and attitudes that influence behaviour.
World Religions (Key Stage 3 Only)	Pupils should be given an introduction to two world religions other than Christianity in order to develop knowledge of and sensitivity towards, the religious beliefs, practices and lifestyles of people from other religions in Northern Ireland.

Whilst it is clear that the curriculum affords many wonderful opportunities for Christian teachers to share the Christian faith in Northern Ireland's schools, it must be noted that the environment in which it is taking place has changed dramatically in the last thirty years. The starting point for many children entering school for the first time is very different than for previous generations, in that many have little or no experience of Christianity. Going to Sunday School and church is no longer the norm for the majority of children, so teaching them about God, the Bible and His church will be different.

Student teachers themselves may feel far from certain about the tenants of the Christian faith, regardless of whether they have grown up inside or outside of the church. Sadly, we cannot assume that those with an active involvement in their local church will be confident of what they believe and why. The shift away from catechesis in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions, towards more programmatic forms of youth ministry, means that even students who acknowledge a personal Christian faith may lack an understanding of basic doctrine by the time they are ready to leave for college. This trend is often referred to as 'Juvenilization'²⁰ within the church and will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

²⁰ Thomas Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), 4.

Teacher Education

Like many aspects of social, cultural and religious life in Northern Ireland the institutional structures involved in Teacher Education were historically segregated on the basis of religion. So, in addition to challenges concerning their own identity and faith development, student teachers preparing to teach RE in Northern Ireland's schools, have to navigate the legacy of religious division between the Christian churches.

There are two separate university colleges – St. Mary's University College (Catholic) and Stranmillis University College (Non-denominational) which are responsible for the majority of initial teacher training in Northern Ireland. Recent statistics show that the vast majority of students attending St Mary's are from the Catholic community, with only 1% of students coming from the Protestant community. At Stranmillis the picture is quite different with approximately 35% of students coming from the Catholic community.²¹ The impact of these demographics has presented a particular challenge for students wishing to obtain a teaching post in a Catholic Maintained school upon completion of their studies, as currently appointments in Catholic Maintained Nursery and Primary Schools, require all teachers to possess a recognised Certificate in Religious Education. There is no such requirement for teachers appointed to teach in Controlled or Integrated Nursery or Primary Schools, although they are required to deliver RE as part of the core curriculum.

A report published by the Department of the Education (2013) highlighted the following:

Over the last 5 years, at least 44.4% of all vacancies in the Primary and Nursery sector have been in schools where the Certificate is required...Whilst this would indicate that those who do not have the Certificate will currently have 50% less job opportunities, qualitative evidence suggests that the majority of this cohort would not apply for posts in the Catholic Maintained sector for other reasons. The Dunn and Gallagher research

²¹ Students in Higher Education 2015/2016 (Higher Education Authority Statistics, 2015), accessed July 21, 2017, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis>.

highlights a chill factor in the north of Ireland that has resulted in a reluctance for Protestants to apply for posts in Catholic Schools and likewise a reluctance for Catholics to apply for posts in the Controlled Sector.²²

In response to employability concerns and following several policy reviews, it is now possible for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students at Stranmillis to undertake a Certificate in Religious Education. Currently students can undertake study via two distance learning options – University of Glasgow and the Life-Light Home Study Course offered by the Catholic Diocese of Derry, it is hoped that a new model of joint delivery with St. Mary’s will be available at Stranmillis from 2018.

However, given that the Certificate is only a requirement for teaching RE in Catholic Maintained Schools and the curriculum focuses on Catholic theology, the principles of Catholic educational and teaching of the sacraments within the classroom, the Certificate is nearly always referred to by students as the ‘Catholic Certificate’. Given the religious and cultural divisions within Northern Ireland this means that the majority of students at Stranmillis are not currently accessing the Certificate, reflecting the ‘chill factor’ pointed out by Gallagher.²³ This means the majority of Protestant students are currently missing out on the opportunity to explore the relationship between their faith and their role as teachers. It is hoped that this will change in time and a greater number of Protestant students will opt to undertake the new joint Certificate in RE at Stranmillis.

²² Review of Employment Opportunities for Teaching Staff (Department of Education, 2013), accessed February 21, 2017, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/Review-of-employment-opportunities-for-teaching-staff-Part-1.pdf>.

²³ Tony Gallagher, 1998. “Religious Divisions in Northern Ireland’s Schools” (paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Queen's University, Belfast, May 21).

Privilege and Possibilities

Christian students entering the teaching profession in Northern Ireland find themselves in a privileged situation compared to their peers in many other parts of the world. But with privilege comes responsibility. How Christian students understand their own faith and their ability to integrate it into their classroom practice, will inform the nature of religious education they provide to the children and young people they will teach.

Given the speed at which the prevailing culture is changing it seems reasonable to assume that the privileged position Christianity currently holds within the Northern Ireland education system is unlikely to remain unchanged over the course of the average teaching career of a Stranmillis graduate. There are already signs that significant change is coming down the tracks in relation to social issues and there is growing pressure on Christians seeking to be faithful within the public square, as the legal case surrounding Asher's bakery has demonstrated.²⁴ It is therefore crucial that emerging generation student teachers have the opportunity to receive training that will equip them for the task of delivering Religious Education in schools and help them to consider how they might live out their Christian faith in the classroom. This will become increasingly important if the Northern Ireland education system becomes more secular in the future and they find themselves teaching in schools that are more hostile to Christianity. In our rapidly changing culture, were the demands for a secular education system are increasing, understanding Christian vocation and how to live out one's faith in the classroom is more important than ever. Even if the structural and legal position remain

²⁴ Ashers Bakery, a small family run business in Northern Ireland recently lost its appeal against a ruling that found the bakery had discriminated against a gay customer for refusing to supply a cake promoting gay marriage. The case has been seen as an indicator that religious freedom is under threat and Northern Ireland is moving towards post-Christendom. A summary of the case can be found here <http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/media/press-releases/disappointment-for-ashers-as-appeal-unsuccessful.cfm>.

unchanged in the short term, the impact of postmodernism on the children and young people they will teach is already being seen.

Emerging Adulthood

Students starting university or college are typically entering what is now recognised as a distinctive life stage – Young Adulthood. This new phase of life span development stretches from age 18-28 when people are no longer adolescents but not quite adults. Various terms have been used over recent years to describe this phase of life, including prolonged or extended adolescence. Jeffery Arnett uses the term ‘emerging adults’²⁵ to describe this phase when young people are no longer youths but do not yet have all the characteristics or responsibilities of being an adult. It is a more positive term, reflecting the dynamic nature of this period of life, as they leave secondary school and begin to explore the world for themselves.

Arnett identifies three signs which indicate that an individual is moving towards adulthood and beginning to assume the characteristics of an adult. The first is a willingness to accept responsibility for their own actions and behaviours, second is their ability to make independent decisions and third is achieving financial independence.²⁶ According to Arnett,²⁷ few young people enter their twenties with clear ideas about their values, beliefs, and worldviews. For many emerging adults, they are still also trying to figure who they are and carve out their own identity, a process which begins during their teenage years, but now continues into young adulthood.

²⁵ Jeffrey Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, *Emerging Adults*, 11.

²⁶ Jeffrey Arnett, “Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context,” *Human Development* 41, no.5 (December 1998): 301.

²⁷ Jeffrey J. Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood in Europe: A response to John Bynner,” *Journal of Youth Studies* 9, no.1 (February 2006): 48.

In his book *This way to Youth Ministry*,²⁸ Duffy Robbins, outlines Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, specifically the process of individuation. Robbins, outlines three key questions which the process of individuation involves for a person to gain their sense of self:

1. 'Who am I?' – The question of identity.
2. 'Where am I going with my life?' – The question of autonomy (literally self-rule), taking responsibility for one's choices.
3. 'How do I – how should I – relate to other people?' – The question of intimacy: "I am a separate (adjective) person from my other family members and my peers, but how can I maintain that 'separateness' without having to separate (verb) from these significant relationships?"

The emergence of this new life stage has been influenced by a range of social and cultural changes which have taken place in recent decades. Sociologist Christian Smith notes six cultural trends that have contributed to the delay in adolescence. Firstly, is the growing importance of higher education. In the UK in 2015 there were 235,000 18 year olds accepted into a full-time place at university, the most ever recorded. In Northern Ireland, the percentage of 18 year olds progressing to university remained the highest in the UK, at 33.5%.²⁹ Smith concludes that due to the high percentage of emerging adults attending college or university the second trend of delayed marriage occurs. The third trend he identifies are changes in the global economy which have resulted in the loss of stable lifelong careers. This also contributes to a delay in marriage, as many emerging adults choose to extend to the amount of time they spend at university pursuing graduate studies due to uncertainty and competitiveness in the job market. The fourth trend is the willingness of parents to support their young adult children as they attempt to establish themselves. Fifth is the development of birth control technology which separates sex from reproduction, with the risk of having children decreased there is a delay into parenthood.

²⁸ Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 164.

²⁹ End of cycle Report 2015 (UCAS Analysis and Research, 2015), accessed July 7, 2017, <https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/eoc-report-2015-v2.pdf>.

Finally, is the philosophy of postmodernism which generates hyper-individualistic views of the world and a relativistic morality.³⁰ Each of these trends has contributed to delayed adulthood and the creation of a separate life stage.

Emerging Adulthood as Transition

As young adults move from adolescence to adulthood, they struggle to find their identity and adapt to their new-found freedom. For those going to university, there are high expectations placed upon them. They are expected to become independent almost overnight, as they leave home for the first time, taking on lots of new responsibilities whilst also succeeding academically, all without the safety net of parents, teachers or established friends around them. This can be overwhelming on many fronts. They may feel isolated and alone, knowing that they are now expected to make decisions on their own not quite sure where to begin or find support. Students training to become teachers and undertaking professional placements as part of their degree programme, face additional challenges. While their peers not undertaking professional degrees can fully embrace the in-between stage of emerging adulthood, student teachers quickly find themselves returning to school, not as pupils but as 'grown ups'. This adds a further degree of complexity as they are learning to renegotiate their identity in the midst of many transitions and try to find their place in the world.³¹

Key loyalties are tested during this time,³² including the religion in which they were raised. This means they need spaces in which to process their faith as they transition into their adult lives. It would be great if this could be their church, sadly however as Kinnaman points out, many young adults do not view church as a safe place in which to express their questions and

³⁰ Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 258.

³¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 34.

³² Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 78.

doubts.³³ The work carried out by Christian Smith and Kenda Creasy Dean has provided valuable insights into the relationship between adolescent / young adult development and their faith formation.

Like many emerging adults, students attending Stranmillis may struggle with their church membership throughout their time at university. Some find themselves 'pulled' back to the church they grew up in on Sundays, often continuing to serve as Sunday School teachers, but with limited opportunities for fellowship or discipleship during the week due to their university commitments. The result is that many of them fail to connect with a congregation close to their university campus during their student years and eventually over time they can easily find themselves drifting away from their home church as the distance becomes too great. Some will drift away as they encounter people who hold different religious or spiritual beliefs and by immersing themselves in new settings, in which going to church seems less important than it once did. This transitional phase of life cannot be viewed in isolation, it is important to understand the nature of faith formation in light of their experiences in youth ministry and the church before they begin university.

Emerging Adults and the Church

'Mass child exodus', 'one generation from extinction', 'teen apostates.'³⁴ These are just some of the headlines representing the dire state that the global Church is in when it comes to the next generation. In recent times, Church leaders in the United Kingdom and North American have become concerned about the exodus of young adults from their churches. Research

³³ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why young Christians are leaving church, and rethinking faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 9.

³⁴ Chine Mbubaegbu, "The Child Exodus and How the Church can Stop It," *Evangelical Alliance News*, February 29, 2012, accessed May 28, 2017, <http://www.eauk.org/idea/the-child-exodus.cfm>.

carried out by church statistician Dr Peter Brierley in 2006 suggested church attendance among teenagers was under ten percent, with just six per cent of 11-14 year olds and five per cent of 15-18 year olds attending church.³⁵

In Northern Ireland, the decline in church attendance has been slower than other parts of the UK but the trend is clearly showing decline here too. This is confirmed by the Northern Ireland Census 2011 which showed an increase in people indicating no religious affiliation from 3.7 % in 1991 to 10.11% in 2011. Table 3 shows the results of the Life and Times Survey carried out annually in Northern Ireland by ARC, which indicates that emerging adults attend church less frequently than older adults, as in the case in the rest of the UK and North America.

Table 3. Church Attendance in Northern Ireland

	%					
Age Group	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	54-64	65+
Frequency of Attendance						
Several times a week	5	2	4	7	9	14
Once a week	16	11	19	27	30	36
2 or 3 times a month	7	11	8	9	9	5
Once a month	9	12	9	8	11	10
Several times a year	18	19	21	18	13	12
Once a year	17	11	6	7	4	3
Less frequently	8	16	12	13	16	9
Never	20	18	20	11	9	11
Don 't know	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Life and Times Survey, 2016

However, just recently, a study commissioned by Christian youth organisation Hope Revolution Partnership and carried out by ComRes, suggested that levels of Christianity in England were much higher among young people than previously thought. The research also showed that more

³⁵ Olivia Rudgard, "One in Six young people are Christian as visits to church buildings inspire them to convert," *Telegraph*, June 17, 2017, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/17/one-six-young-people-christian-visits-church-buildings-inspire>.

young people are positive about Jesus and Christianity than previously thought too. Amongst the 11-18 year olds surveyed, 21% self-identify as followers of Jesus and 13% say they pray and read the Bible weekly and attend church monthly.

Phil Timson, HOPE's youth director and one of the team who commissioned the research said,

Whatever young people mean when they identify as followers of Jesus, it means we have a great starting point as we seek to equip young Christians. The research didn't define church, so for a young person this might include chapel services at faith schools, youth groups, Bible studies, prayer events or any other manner of things that young people could identify as going to church.³⁶

David Kinnaman notes that many young people who attend church and are enthusiastic about their faith,³⁷ lose their enthusiasm as they transition into young adulthood. He says, 'A majority say they are less active in church today compared to when they were age fifteen.'³⁸ Christian Smith reported a similar trend by examining the results of the 2007-2008 National Survey of Youth and Religion. He documented a significant change in religious adherence from ages 13-17 to ages 18-23, with church attendance declining from about thirty eight percent to twenty five percent.³⁹ There was also an average decline of 10% in the significance of religion in shaping their lives.⁴⁰ Smith discovered a growing trend among emerging adults to not identify with any religion.⁴¹

Both Pete Ward and Nick Shepherd writing about the decline in young adult church attendance in the United Kingdom agree that the pattern is similar. Shepherd says, "There is something about the transition period of youth and young adulthood where the pressures of

³⁶ Phil Timson "Mission Academy Live: helping young people share Jesus" *Evangelical Alliance News*, June 27, 2017, accessed July 17 2017, <http://www.eauk.org/church/stories/mission-academy-live-helping-young-people-share-jesus.cfm>.

³⁷ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 232-233.

³⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 270-271.

³⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 113.

⁴⁰ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 114.

⁴¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 141.

holding faith in a secular age are felt more keenly, or have a more profound effect.”⁴² This is supported by findings from a study conducted by Stephen Bullivant which found that the non-religious (Nones) in Britain are notably youthful, with 35% of all 18-35 year olds describing themselves as Nones, compared to 29% of general population and at the other end, only 11% of those aged 65 or over.

Lots of theories have been offered in seeking to explain the problem of decline amongst young adults. Some blame the secular world in which young adults live, others the patterns of parental church attendance. Andrew Brown, writing in the Guardian newspaper says, “the way this has happened is important: adults did not stop going to church, but they failed to transmit the habit to their children and now they are dying out.”⁴³ Perhaps most concerning is the possibility that youth ministry programmes in the church are not spiritually equipping young adults for their lives beyond the youth group.⁴⁴ When transitional challenges associated with going to college or starting work hit, many young adults feel unprepared and their faith is not fully developed. Kinnaman states, “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it’s a disciple-making problem.”⁴⁵ The process of discipleship in our churches amongst young people is seriously lacking in many instances. Kenda Creasy Dean claims that the church is ‘failing rather badly in religiously engaging and educating youth.’⁴⁶

In Northern Ireland, the church has faced additional challenges in retaining young people in recent years. During the Troubles attending church was seen as an important

⁴² Nick Shepherd, *Faith Generation: Retaining Young People and Growing the Church* (London: SPCK, 2016), 8.

⁴³ Andrew Brown, “Faith no more: how the British are losing their religion,” *Guardian*, April 14, 2015.

⁴⁴ Jeremy Uecker, Mark Regnerus and Margret Vaaler, “Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood,” *Social Forces* 85, no. 4 (June 2007).

⁴⁵ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 236-237.

⁴⁶ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 11.

expression of your individual and community identity but that is now perceived as less important in post conflict Northern Ireland.⁴⁷ During the late 1990's and 2000's the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland was engulfed in a wave of sex scandals which resulted in a significant decline in church attendance generally. Emerging generations have often rejected the strong political opinions held by the main stream Protestant churches, and many Catholic young people have turned away from the institutional church in the wake of child abuse scandals. When combined with the rampant individualism which is so prevalent in western society, many young adults have left main stream denominations in recent years. Scepticism concerning the institutional church is common place and many Protestant student teachers are completely unaware that the churches have any interest or involvement in the education system. When it comes to thinking about mission or ministry in schools they are much more likely to look to Scripture Union NI, Youth for Christ or Crown Jesus Ministries, than their own or other denominations. This reflects a global trend in the church to look to specialist youth ministry organisations in order to reach and evangelise the young.

In the United Kingdom, just as in North America youth groups and youth ministry organisations have tried to stem the tide and halt the exodus of young people from the church. However, Thomas Bergler critiques these recent developments in church culture referring to the 'Juvenilization' of the church.⁴⁸ Nick Shepherd in his book *Faith Generation* states that it has been assumed that young people are leaving the church because they have increased activity choices and the church is dull – the response has been to make sure that church is not dull.⁴⁹ There seems little doubt that attractational models of church have contributed to the juvenile

⁴⁷ David Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015).

⁴⁸ Thomas Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2012), 289-295.

⁴⁹ Nick Shepherd, *Faith Generation*, 34.

nature of the church, drawing young people into high energy, dynamic programmes designed to keep them entertained but which have failed to pass on authentic transformative faith.

Shepherd argues that some of the changes which have occurred within churches in the UK are closely aligned with the findings of the National Study on Youth and the work of Christian Smith and Kenda Creasy Dean in the USA. He argues the gospel has become more about us than about God. There when we want or need something but otherwise largely irrelevant in relation to daily life. In *Making Sense of Generation Y* a young person who described themselves as a practising Christian said: “if you are struggling – everyone struggles in life – sometimes you need someone. Even though you have got your family and friends to talk to, it sometimes just feels like you need somebody else to talk to, so you talk to God.”⁵⁰ This is an example of what Christian Smith calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. In reality MTD means that many Christian young people believe that faith is about trying to be a good person (Moral), that if they have a problem or are feeling down that God will solve their problems and help make them happy again (Therapeutic) but they do not believe that God is really involved in their lives beyond this (Deism).⁵¹ Smith highlights five key beliefs held by those who embrace Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. God created the world and watches over it.
2. God wants people to be nice and fair, like most religions teach.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be involved with one’s life except when there is a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.⁵²

⁵⁰ Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo and Bob Mayo with Graham Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15-25 year olds. Explorations* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006).

⁵¹ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.

⁵² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 154.

This belief system is carried by young people into their young adult lives and contributes to their immature or underdeveloped faith. Kenda Creasy Dean pulls no punches in stating that teenagers practice Moralistic Therapeutic Deism because they have learned it from the church. Highlighting the work of Dean and research in *From Anecdote to Evidence* in which only thirty eight percent of committed Christian parents see it as 'important' to be proactive in passing on faith to the next generation,⁵³ Shepherd says "Maybe the ambivalent faith shown by parents is a symptom of a wider holding of MTD-like faith in the UK Context."⁵⁴ Young people have been sold a faith which is merely an accessory to their lives, rather than a faith that transforms every aspect of lives.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is not genuine Christianity. It dilutes the message and leaves young adults struggling to relate the faith they have inherited in their church or youth group to their lives and calling beyond it. Pete Ward suggests that the methods and structure of youth groups fail to help young people transition to adulthood, as they have limited opportunities for participation in the life of the church and are rarely given opportunities to take on significant responsibility. This contributes to a diminished process of spiritual formation.⁵⁵ This Juvenilization contributes to young adults disconnect with the spiritual life of the church.⁵⁶ Young people eager to embrace adulthood, have to leave the church because there is no place for them.⁵⁷ Those who remain in the church, often continue as a member of the youth group, staying rooted in the adolescent world and failing to develop a more mature faith. They have limited opportunity to explore how their faith relates to their academic studies or their chosen

⁵³ Church of England, *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-2013* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014).

⁵⁴ Nick Shepherd, *Faith Generation*, 78.

⁵⁵ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 172-179.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 172-179.

⁵⁷ Pete Ward, *Growing up Evangelical: Youthwork and the Making of a Subculture* (London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), 195-198.

profession and are not developing a mature intrinsic faith which flows into to all areas of their lives, including their vocation.

Given emerging adults' struggles, Arnett sees the need for greatly expanded societal efforts to help them navigate the transition into careers and family. He believes such efforts will pay off, given the self-awareness people develop in their 20s and their willingness to change.⁵⁸ Smith and Snell's research emphasizes the powerful role non-parental adults play in the lives of emerging adults.⁵⁹ Through mentoring and the creation of opportunities to explore meaning and purpose, Parks believes that "every institution of higher education serves in at least some measure as a community of imagination in which every professor is potentially a spiritual guide and every syllabus a confession of faith."⁶⁰ Christian faculty at Stranmillis have the opportunity to get alongside their younger brothers and sisters in Christ as they make the transition to adulthood, helping them to grow spiritually, develop Christian character and increase their vocational understanding.

This will be a challenging task because the ability of young adults to integrate their faith commitment into all areas of their lives is affected by delays in their cognitive, social and vocational development. Christian Smith highlights the tendency towards therapeutic individualism, the positivism of scientific progress and consumerism as contributing to the disconnect between young adults and the older adult frameworks of spiritual life.⁶¹

Smith seeks to set the faith development of young adults within the wider context of the social environment in which they live. If the observations regarding the church and patterns

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22.

⁵⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 155.

⁶⁰ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith*, 10th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 159.

⁶¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 172-189.

of immature faith development are true, then young adults are being denied the opportunity to develop deeper understandings of the Christian faith and how to integrate their faith into all areas of their lives. Young adults have little or no theological framework within which to locate their individual beliefs and are being formed more by the cultural influences and the social contexts in which they live than by biblical and historical understandings of the faith. Smith concludes, that, “We need to see, for example, how those individuals have been socialized—how their assumptions, beliefs, and aspirations have been formed and internalized.”⁶² In seeking to understand young adults we will now look at the wider cultural trends that are present within postmodern thinking, consumerism and the global pressures on young adults’ lives.

The Influence of Postmodernity

The social environment in which young adults live is postmodern. The solid foundations of the modern era have been eroded, the notion of objective truth and logical patterns in the universe have been traded in under the banner human progress. Postmodernism rejects modernity’s understanding that there is objective knowledge waiting to be discovered.⁶³ Instead truth is viewed as being socially constructed.⁶⁴ This means that all knowledge is relative, open to interpretation depending upon the social context or community in which it resides. Grenz concludes that this means there are two common beliefs within postmodern thinking. The first is that all reality is constructed and cannot be objectively true.⁶⁵ All truth claims are considered relative. The second is that no-one can make a truth claim because it is impossible to have a large enough perspective. Postmodernity therefore rejects any notion that there can be a

⁶² Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson and Snell, *Lost in Transition*, 258.

⁶³ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 131.

⁶⁴ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

⁶⁵ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 43.

unifying grand narrative, creating an environment in which it is much harder for emerging adults to develop a mature Christian faith. To assert that Christianity is universally true is strongly contested, which when added into the mix of increased exposure to multiple religions and ideologies, cements this thinking in the minds of young adults. Christianity is seen as just one religion among many. All of this has a relativizing effect and creates a world in which each person defines what is true for themselves. According to Grenz, the impact of this on the religious identity and affiliation of Generation Z is significant.⁶⁶ It is no longer assumed that religious belief is a part of life. Charles Taylor remarks that society has created an environment where, “it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believers, is one human possibility among others.”⁶⁷

Returning to the transitional nature of young adulthood, Friedrich Schweitzer views it as part of the postmodern life cycle. He acknowledges that there are changes within a person’s lifecycle, but that there have also been changes of the lifecycle itself because of the postmodern environment.⁶⁸ The way in which the life cycle itself operates has changed. The pluralistic society within which our young adults are now living is strongly influencing their ‘intellectualized conceptions of truth and religious meaning.’⁶⁹ There are two things which contribute to this, firstly they are at a time in their lives when they are reflecting and assessing the environment in which they have grown up. Secondly, the religious nature of Northern Ireland society and especially the large cosmopolitan city of Belfast in which they come to live as students has also experienced significant change in the last twenty years.

Faith development is now considered a life-long project.⁷⁰ Schweitzer states, ‘Life has

⁶⁶ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 72.

⁶⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle* (Duluth, GA: Chalice Press, 2004), 10.

⁶⁹ Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle*, 11.

⁷⁰ Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle*, 17.

become a project for which everyone is responsible by himself or herself.⁷¹ Young adults are immersed in a culture with no assumed belief system and no clear sense of what their role is now or will be in the future. The result is that how they view religion is very different to how the generations that went before them viewed it. Christian Smith offers the following insights into the religious views of emerging adults:

- Talking about religion isn't a threatening topic of discussion; it's just not that important in their lives.
- There is a blending of religious ideals. They are pluralistic, holding to more than one ideology as equal validity.
- They feel that all religions have a similar commonality. The religious particularities are peripheral.
- Religion is helpful, but not authoritative. Religion exists to support individuals. Each person is to choose for him or herself what to believe.
- For many, they associate the religion of their parents with dependence.
- The church is exclusive. The church is perceived as exclusive. It is not a place to find belonging. The church is not a safe place to express doubts.
- Religion is not what most young adults organize their lives around.⁷²

Recalling one interview with a young woman on different religions, she replied that, "I just think it's all subjective to each person. I really do think that everything is pretty much subjective."⁷³

Subjectivity also affects the moral choices of many emerging adults, Smith found that "Six out of ten (60 percent) of the emerging adults we interviewed expressed a highly individualistic approach to morality. Morality is a personal choice, entirely a matter of individual decision."⁷⁴ Emerging adults who hold to an individualistic view of morality will resist expressing

⁷¹ Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle*, 16.

⁷² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 144-158.

⁷³ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 49.

⁷⁴ Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, and Snell, *Lost in Transition*, 420- 422.

their moral views because they are cautious about imposing them on others. While being non-judgmental is good,⁷⁵ being morally individualistic tends to lead people to think they have no obligation to care for others in need. This poses a problem in light of the many complex moral issues that are currently swirling around in Northern Ireland society and which young adults themselves are facing. This will perhaps also cause some concern in wider society, as in the past parents and society in general have looked to teachers to provide moral instruction to the children and young people in their care. Emerging generation teachers will have to navigate this relative moral environment whilst being expected to teach Christian morality as understood within the traditional orthodox framework prescribed by the churches in the RE curriculum and deliver effective pastoral care unable to condemn damaging behaviour for fear of causing offence or infringing an individual's human rights.

Kinnaman suggests that some young adults leave the church is because their questions are not welcomed. In many cases they reject the church's own values of compromise and cultural assumptions, especially within the institutional structures of the larger denominational churches. Kinnaman notes that they are 'caught between the church as it is and what they believe it is called to be.'⁷⁶ As has already been noted some churches have departed from the patterns of faith and worship we see in the New Testament, adopting characteristics more in line with consumerist, postmodern culture than with the biblical marks of Christ's church.

The Influence of Consumerism

The faith formation of emerging generations is also greatly influenced by another very powerful reality: consumerism. The values attached to materialistic consumerism have been

⁷⁵ Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, and Snell, *Lost in Transition*, 494.

⁷⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 120.

critiqued for their destabilizing effect on young adults.⁷⁷ In postmodern societies, marketing is an ever-present force in driving our desires and our consumerist economies. The marketers set out to appeal to real desires in terms of identity, relationships and search for meaning in life. It is in the context of this larger consumerist culture that young adults are being spiritually formed.⁷⁸ The result is a pick and mix approach to faith.

A 2005 study by Vincent Miller, asserts that consumer desire is more than hedonism. “It is not focused on sensual pleasure. It is not particularly attached to objects of consumption. It commodifies with a promise of personal fulfilment.”⁷⁹ Consumerist society is not simply about providing for our economic and material needs, it is also defining those who live within it. Young adults may be completely unaware that their identity has been formed in millions of little ways by market forces ever since they were small children, worst still they themselves have been reduced to a commodity being exploited and manipulated for financial gain. All of this is having a massive impact on identity formation in emerging adulthood. For those who aspire to work out the implications of their Christian faith in their adult lives, they have to battle against an often engrained consumerism, in order to claim their identity as Christ followers.

The impact of consumerism on higher education in the United Kingdom has been widely noted since the introduction of tuition fees in 1998.⁸⁰ Many academics have lamented that this change has fostered a culture whereby students seek to ‘have a degree’ rather than ‘be learners’.⁸¹ This may be in part because it promotes passive instrumental attitudes to learning, in

⁷⁷ James E Burroughs and Aric Rindfleisch, “Materialism and Well-Being: A Conflicting Values Perspective,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 29, no. 3 (December 2002): 348, accessed May 7, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/0093-5301/2003/2903-000>.

⁷⁸ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 177.

⁷⁹ Vincent Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Society* (University of Michigan: Continuum International Publishing, 2005), 114.

⁸⁰ The Teaching and Higher Education Act, 1998, chap. 1 (United Kingdom).

⁸¹ John Williams, “Constructing Consumption: What Media Representations Reveal about Today's Students.” In *The Marketization of Higher Education*, ed. Mike Molesworth, Richard Scullion, and Elizabeth Nixon (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 170–82.

other words, students who identify as consumers may have little interest in what is actually being taught and show reduced responsibility for constructing their own knowledge.⁸² For those training to be teachers the impact of these changing attitudes may have more serious implications for their future careers than for other graduates. If Christian student teachers are to rise above these cultural attitudes, they must be encouraged to treasure the education they themselves receive during training, 'Let the wise hear and increase in learning,' (Proverbs 1:5) so that in turn they might impart the gift of learning to their pupils.

The Influence of Globalization

Northern Ireland, like many other parts of Europe has experienced a rapid rise in ethnic diversity and increases in the percentage of the population that identify as members of a different religion. Prior to the peace process, the country had one of the most homogeneous populations in the UK due to the high levels of violence and instability. Since 1998, the speed of change as a result of globalization has been very rapid and has resulted in significant disruption to societal and religious norms. Robertson's defines globalisation as follows, "Globalization as a concept refers to both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole, its main empirical focus is in line with the increasing acceleration in both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole and in the twentieth century."⁸³

Increased awareness of other world religions, has added to the pluralistic tendencies of emerging adults. As interconnectivity has increased, traditional religious ideology has lost some

⁸² Tony Woodall, Alex Hiller, and Sheilagh Resnick, "Making Sense of Higher Education: Students as Consumers and the Value of the University Experience," *Studies in Higher Education* 39, no.1 (December 2014): 48–67.

⁸³ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage Pub., 1992), 8.

of its distinctiveness. The diminishing of national boundaries as a result of globalization, has brought to Northern Ireland shores an increased number of believers from different faiths. For young adults growing up in the midst of this increasing diversity, they must weigh the truth claims of Christianity up within this increasingly pluralistic world.⁸⁴ They must do so without being able to draw on the personal wisdom gained by experience of older generations, most of whom did not have to contend with a plurality of faiths when they were growing up in Northern Ireland. The result is that historical religious beliefs and practices have been marginalized. Osmer and Schweitzer describe this 'detraditionalization' as the 'breakdown of the intergenerational process of introducing the next generation to the Christian tradition.'⁸⁵ Therefore, globalization increases the challenges of identity formation in young adults. Osmer and Schweitzer point out that the interconnection with other cultures has produced the result of a 'processive' view of life.⁸⁶ The markers of personal identity are shifting, not only during adolescence but often throughout a person's life.

Faith Development

The work of James Fowler is useful in seeking to understand how emerging generations develop a mature Christian faith. Fowler, was both a theologian and a developmental psychologist, he pioneered faith development theory, drawing upon Jean Piaget's and Erick Erickson's life span development theories, with additional insights from H. Richard Niebuhr's

⁸⁴ Friedrich Schweitzer, "Youth and Religion: Theoretical, Empirical, and Practical Perspectives from Germany" in *Youth, Religion and Globalization: New Research in Practical Theology*, eds. Richard Robert Osmer and Kenda Creasy Dean (St.Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007), 17-58.

⁸⁵ Richard Osmer and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 2003), 20-21.

⁸⁶ James Fowler, Richard Osmer, and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Developing a Public Faith: New Directions in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James W. Fowler* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 145.

theology of grace. His theory provides insights into the process of spiritual formation during periods of transition, so characteristic of young adulthood. It also offers a means of analysing both the micro level of emerging adults' immediate social context and the wider macro forces at work in society.

Fowler's theory outlines three particular ways in which his theory contributes to our understanding of how faith develops:

1. It is a way of knowing

Fowler defines faith as a search for meaning in life. Faith is not a compartmentalised aspect of life, rather he sees faith as the total orientation of a person in every aspect of their lives. Faith is a way of knowing, a total knowing of oneself regardless of the context an individual finds themselves in.

2. In the context of relationship

Fowler notes the importance of the relational input of others for faith to develop. He states that faith is relational, not propositional.⁸⁷ The relationship is a three-way connection. Fowler sees faith development occurring in relation to oneself, others, and the ultimate source of meaning. Faith development involves people in relationship who are connected to 'the ultimate' source of meaning.

3. It is a developmental perspective

Fowler's premise is that each person goes through a process that matures him or her in faith. He believes this knowing is sequential. Each stage builds upon the previous stages. An individual

⁸⁷ James W. Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," in *Faith Development and Fowler*, eds. Craig R. Dykstra and Sharon Daloz Parks (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1986), 18.

comprehends her or his faith according to their own developmental understanding of faith. Each stage of life has its own characteristics that define it and people in the life cycle progress in a particular order. Faith stage theory shows how a person potentially progresses as he or she grows through the life cycle. The commitment to faith may stay the same for each stage, but the way of being in relationship to that faith changes.⁸⁸

Schools and Faith

Two recent studies in the UK have highlighted the importance young people place on school as an important part of their faith development. The first is a study, commissioned by Christian youth organisation Hope Revolution, suggested that levels of Christianity were much higher among young people than previously thought. The figures, show that twenty one percent of young people between the ages of 11 and 18 describe themselves as active followers of Jesus, and thirteen percent say they are practising Christians who pray and read the Bible weekly and attend church monthly. Phil Timson, HOPE's youth director and one of the team who commissioned the research states, "The research didn't define church, so for a young person this might include chapel services at faith schools, youth groups, Bible studies, prayer events or any other manner of things that young people could identify as going to church."⁸⁹

The second study Generation Z *Rethinking Culture*⁹⁰ published by YFC found that thirty two percent of young people believe in a God and of that group fifty nine percent, consider themselves a follower of Jesus. When asked to think about the reasons they became a Christian family had the greatest influence at seventy three percent, followed by teachers thirty six

⁸⁸ Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," 39.

⁸⁹ Hope Revolution, *Perceptions of Jesus Research* (ComRes, 2017), accessed July 5, 2017 <http://www.comresglobal.com/polls/hope-church-of-England-perceptions-of-jesus-survey>.

⁹⁰ Generation Z, *Rethinking Culture Research Report* (YFC England, December 2016), accessed July 5, 2017, <https://indd.adobe.com/view/0672cab6-cf26-4595-b572-9146f31af43e>.

percent, with going to a religious school sitting at fifteen percent. When asked to think about which activities had been most important in their coming to faith seven percent of young people said School assemblies; five percent said their School Christian Union; and three percent said a School Based Mission was the most important activity. These figures would seem to indicate that the school environment is a significant space in which young people can explore the Christian faith.

These findings should give encouragement to Christian Schools Workers employed by YFC and many other youth ministry organizations in the UK to keep going. It should also serve as an encouragement to Christian teachers to take seriously the opportunities they have to share their faith with the young people in their classrooms.

The Research Question

Taking on board the current social, cultural, education and religious context of Northern Ireland and the influence of postmodernism on the faith development of emerging generation student teachers, this thesis-project will ask *“How do Christian student teachers view their role in delivering religious education in Northern Ireland schools?”*

The Thesis Project

Students taking part in the project will participate in a short series of seminars which will provide them with opportunities to consider the Religious Education Curriculum and consider their role as Christian teachers. By considering a biblically shaped, integrated model of faith and learning, student will be better equipped for their role in the delivery of religious education within schools. The seminar content is focused on exploring a Christian worldview,

examples of Christian pedagogy in the school classroom and the biblical foundations of Christian vocation.

Overview

I will defend my thesis by exploring its biblical/theological framework in Chapter Two. Chapter Three will review relevant literature, focusing on emerging adulthood; vocation; Christian teaching and learning. In Chapter Four the project design will be set out, it consists of four parts i) Pre-Seminar Questionnaire, ii) Seminar Content and Delivery, iii) Post Seminar Questionnaire and iv) Seminar Evaluations. Finally, Chapter Five will explore the following:

1. What can be learned from conducting this thesis-project?
2. How can the insights gained be used to improve the training and spiritual formation of Christian students at Stranmillis?
3. Propose ways in which the learning from this thesis-project can be integrated into a new Certificate in Religious Education to be offered at Stranmillis.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Integrating Faith and Work

Christians must revive a centuries-old view of humankind as made in the image of God, the eternal craftsman, and of work as a source of fulfilment and blessing not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfil itself to the glory of God. That it should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of the work itself; and that man, made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing.¹

Introduction

Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957) believed that Christians lacked a biblical perspective on work. In her classic essay *Why Work?* Sayers argued for a revolution amongst Christians regarding their whole attitude towards work, her words and wisdom seem as relevant today as they were to her contemporaries. Whelchel cautions that many 21st century believers have adopted a narrow view of their work, buying into the consumerist culture and the pagan idea that leisure is good and work is bad.² They see their work as a way of paying the bills, giving more thought as to how they can buy a nice house, drive the right car, go on good holidays and own the right stuff, than thinking about how their work connects to the purposes of God. In doing so they miss the significance and value that God has placed on work from the very beginning.

Sayers believed the Bible contains three key ideas central to a Christian understanding of work. Firstly, that work is a creative act. She writes "That it [work] should, in fact, be thought

¹ Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1974), 89.

² Hugh Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work: Rediscovering the Biblical Doctrine of Work* (McLean, VA: Institute for Faith, Work and Economics, 2012), 4.

of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of the work itself; and that man, made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is worth doing."³ The Bible begins with a description of how God created the world and includes two references to God's creative activity as work.⁴ In the beginning God created the world, forming the heavens and the earth, out of nothing, and declaring that it was good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The first accounts of God at work in Genesis, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, are filled with creativity and goodness. We see the Creator fashioning heaven and earth, then delighting in the work of his hands – "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array" (Genesis 1:31, 2:1). Adam and Eve are part of God's good work in creation, created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-28), humans were designed with work in mind.

Secondly, Sayers believed that work points towards human being's ultimate purpose in life. Echoing the Westminster Catechism which teaches that man's chief end is to 'glorify God and enjoy him forever.' Sayers wrote that work "should be looked upon, not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfil itself to the glory of God."⁵ When work is carried out according to God's purposes, it has an unmistakable holiness, bringing praise and glory to Him. Our work is meant to serve God's purposes. In and through their work, Christians have an opportunity to fulfil the cultural mandate found in Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15, contributing to the common good, whilst finding purpose and meaning by integrating their faith and work under the guidance and direction of God.

³ Sayers, *Creed and Chaos*, 6.

⁴ Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 142.

⁵ Sayers, *Creed and Chaos*, 8.

From the beginning God created and intended human beings to be his partners in the work of bringing creation to fulfilment. God brought into being a flawless creation, and then made humanity to continue the creation project. "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth'" (Genesis 1:28a). "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). The two words in Hebrew, *avad* ('work' or 'till') and *shamar* ('keep'), are also used for the worship of God and keeping his commandments, respectively. God could have created everything imaginable and filled the earth himself but instead he chose to create human beings to work alongside him to actualize the world's potential, to participate in God's own work.

After the Fall all aspects of human life, including the true nature of work were distorted. When Adam and Eve rejected the task of stewardship entrusted to them by choosing to fulfil their own desires rather than fulfil the call of God on their lives. God told them as a result of their sin, their work would become difficult, frustrating or meaningless, requiring toil and strenuous effort often for little reward, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you" (Genesis 3:17b-18a). The sense of struggle associated with work may be one of the reasons why the importance of daily work in the lives of believers is often a forgotten or neglected area of Christian discipleship. Yet in total the Bible talks about work more than 800 times, more than all the words used to describe worship, music, praise and singing combined. Given the frequency with which the biblical text refers to work it is clear that God places great significance and importance on our work.

Through Christ's redemptive work in their lives Christians can approach their work as culture making with a clearer understanding of God's intentions and purposes for his world.

Pearcey writes:

The lesson of the Cultural Mandate is that our sense of fulfilment depends on engaging in creative, constructive work. The ideal human existence is not eternal leisure or an endless vacation—or even a monastic retreat into prayer and meditation—but creative effort expended for the glory of God and the benefit of others. Our calling is not just to “go to heaven” but also to cultivate the earth, not just to “save souls” but also to serve God through our work. For God himself is engaged not only in the work of salvation but also in the work of preserving and developing His creation. When we obey the Cultural Mandate, we participate in the work of God himself.⁶

As the second Adam, Jesus lived the sinless life on earth that the first Adam could not live, through his perfect life Jesus fulfilled the cultural mandate. It is through His life, death, and resurrection that Christians enter into the Kingdom in the present age and work to fulfil the cultural mandate to the glory of God, extending His Kingdom here on earth. Jesus encourages his disciples to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Paul reminded Christians in Colossae that all work is God’s work, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:22-24). Holding on to an eternal perspective will help Christians connect their work to the eternal purposes of God.

The third idea to highlight from Sayers essay *Why Work?* is her clear assertion that there is no distinction between sacred and secular work. She says,

In nothing has the Church so lost her hold on reality as her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. Integrating our faith and work is not simply about sharing our faith with a colleague or pupil in our classroom, it is about doing our job well. A Christian teacher should strive for excellence in their teaching in order that they might bring glory to God and serve others well.⁷

⁶ Nancy Pearce, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

⁷ Dorothy Sayers, *Why Work?* (York, UK: Methuen and Company, 1942).

Having spoken to many Christian students at the college and within youth ministry settings in Northern Ireland, it is clear that a significant number believe that working for the church or in full time missionary service is what it means to work for God. As with Christians living at the time of Sayers writing, a significant number of emerging generation students appear to have bought into a sacred / secular divide that is not reflected in the scriptures. Paul Helm in his book *The Callings: The Gospel in the World*, suggests, “Work is part of a Christian’s calling...this biblical idea has had a profound influence in Europe and North America since the Reformation but has largely been forgotten, due to the eclipse of the influence of the Christian gospel from national life.”⁸ Therefore, highlighting the teaching of reformers such as Luther and Calvin, who taught that all labor was meaningful if performed ‘as unto the Lord’ will be useful in helping Christian students to see teaching as an expression of their Christian calling. As Steve Garber so brilliantly puts it, to view their work as integral to their faith, rather than incidental.⁹

This thesis-project aims to encourage Christian students training to become teachers to think biblically and theologically about their work, so that they might more fully embrace their calling to fulfil the cultural mandate and seek to integrate their faith and classroom practice. As they are preparing to enter the teaching profession it is vital that Christian students become familiar with what the Bible says about work. What follows in this chapter is an overview of work in both the Old and New Testament and some reflections on the theological implications of seeing work as integral to the life of every Christian.

⁸ Paul Helm, *The Callings: The Gospel in the World* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 98-99.

⁹ Steve Garber, *Visions of Vocation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

Work in the Old Testament

Throughout scripture the importance of work in the life of every believer is emphasised time and time again. In the Old Testament work is a significant theme, in which the work of God's people in a wide variety of roles and activities is noted. A wide range of work is celebrated including that of farmers, craftsmen, priests, judges, kings and queens. There are also places in which human work is clearly linked to God's work in the world. This section of the thesis-project seeks to highlight some key references to work within the Old Testament in order to convey the importance which God attaches to everyday work in the life of His people.

It is interesting to note that in the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) individuals are often referred to by their vocation. For example, Abel was a 'keeper of sheep' and Cain 'a tiller of the ground' (Genesis 4:2). There is a clear sense in the scriptures that the work people do is valuable and important to God. So important that it should not be overlooked in the biblical accounts.

Table 4. Vocational Descriptions in the Pentateuch

Name	Vocational Description
Tubalcain	"made all kinds of bronze and iron tools." (Genesis 4:22)
Nimrod	was "a mighty hunter." (Genesis 10:9)
Abraham	was "very rich in livestock," while his nephew Lot had "flocks and herds and tents." (Genesis 13:2 and 13:4)
Esau	was "a skilful hunter, a man of the fields," while Jacob was "a quiet man, living in tents." (Genesis 25:27)
Isaac	"planted crops" and was envied by the Philistines because "he had so many flocks and herds and servants." (Genesis 26:12 and 14)

The historical books of the Old Testament (Joshua - Esther) contain many passages in which creativity, craftsmanship and stewardship are celebrated. For example:

Table 5. Vocational Descriptions in the Historical Books of the Old Testament

Name	Vocational Description
Joshua	made the Gibeonites “hewers of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation.” (Joshua 9:21)
Sampson’s father	was interested in the work that his son would do. (Judges 13:12)
Ruth	gleaned “in the field behind the reapers.” (Ruth 2:3)
David	kept his family’s sheep. (1 Samuel 16:11)
Sidonians	were known as the best at cutting timbers. (1 Kings 5:6)
Solomon	had “seventy thousand labourers and eighty thousand stonecutters.” (1 Kings 5:15)
Carpenters, builders, masons and stonecutters	worked on the temple of the Lord. (2 Kings 12:12)

Vocational descriptions are also included in both the Major and Minor Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). For example:

Table 6. Vocational Descriptions in the Prophets of the Old Testament

Name	Vocational Description
Artisans, metalworkers and goldsmiths	created idols. (Isaiah 40:19-20 and Jeremiah 10:3-9)
The Lord	is described as a ‘potter’ and His people ‘the clay.’ (Isaiah 27:12-25); asked, “If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes?” (Obadiah 1:5)
Idols	were made of silver “all of them the work of craftsmen.” (Hosea 13:2)
Zerubbabel, Joshua and the whole remnant of the people	worked on the House of the Lord. (Haggai 1:14)

The number of times vocational language is used in the Old Testament clearly points towards the significance that God places work and reveal some important theological concepts about the relationship between God and the work of His people.

Work as a Gift from God

There are many passages in the Old Testament that describe work as *a gift* from God. J.

I. Packer points out, ‘the Jews had a high regard for manual work and a deep respect for those who did it well, whose ability was sometimes referred to as a gift of God’s spirit.’¹⁰ In Genesis 1 God says to Adam,

Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. God said see I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. (Genesis 1:28-30)

Although this passage does not specifically mention the word *work*, it implies that Adam was to work in order to fulfil the calling God had given to him. This sense that Adam was to work and care for God’s creation, is even more explicit in Genesis 2:15, which states ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to *till it and keep it*.’ The Hebrew word for *till* is ‘*abhad*’— which is commonly used for work or labour in the Old Testament.¹¹ Work is a gift from God, a creative process, through which God can provide and bless his people.

Table 7. Work as a Gift of God in the Old Testament

Description	Passage
“Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him.”	Gen. 26:12
“Worship the Lord your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water.”	Exod. 23:25
“The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them.”	Exod. 39:42-43

¹⁰ J.I. Packer, “Tekton,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI:1971), 279.

¹¹ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 712-713.

Table 7. Work as a Gift of God in the Old Testament (continued)

"The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed."	Deut. 28:4-5
In describing Job, Satan explained that God had "blessed the work of his hands."	Job 1:10
"Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded, declares the Lord"	Jer. 31:16
"Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things! ...The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil."	Joel 2:21-24

In postmodern societies, work is often viewed as an inconvenience or simply a means to an end, providing people with the financial resources to enjoy a certain standard of living and enjoy plenty of leisure time. There is a sense in these passages that the work a person carries out is connected to their relationship with God and that the rewards or blessings of work extend far beyond financial or material reward. Keller states,

Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work, we sense significant inner loss and emptiness. People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need work to thrive emotionally, physically and spiritually.¹²

Given the pressure and strain placed on teachers in the education system today, it is important that Christian students come to understand and view their work as teacher as a gift from God. Having developed a biblical and theological perspective regarding the value of their work, they must then look to God's word for instruction in terms of how they are to carry out their work as teachers.

Character and Competency

The standards expected of teachers are perhaps higher than many other professions. Teachers are not only required to be able to pass on knowledge, but also to ensure the holistic

¹² Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavour* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2012), 38.

development of the children and young people entrusted to their care. The first section in the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI) Handbook, outlines the standards required to gain qualified teacher status in Northern Ireland. It outlines the 'Personal Qualities' and 'Professional Competencies.'¹³ This is encouraging but for Christian teachers it is first and foremost important to consider what the Bible with regard to their character and competency.

Today the environment in which many people live and work is hostile to the truth claims of Christianity. So, despite the inclusion of a Christian based RE Curriculum in Northern Ireland schools, Christian teachers still report feeling intimidated by the prevailing culture both outside and inside their school. The challenge therefore is to consider how to live and work in an environment that may be hostile to your faith, whilst developing your personal and professional character and competency.

Into is into this context that the stories of Joseph and Daniel offer biblical examples of how Christians should seek to conduct themselves and their work in ways that honour God, even in the midst of oppression and fear. Their lives stand out as wonderful examples of character and competency, both personally and professionally. They embody the type of values that are required of all those who would teach, whether in the church or the school classroom. In these very practical case studies, the Bible provides guidance for Christian teachers keen to understand how their faith and work should be interact.

Lessons from the Life of Joseph

At a young age Joseph, rejected and sold into slavery by his brothers (Genesis 37:2-36) finds himself sold to Potiphar 'the captain of the guard' and an 'officer of Pharaoh in Egypt.' (Genesis 37:36; 39:1). Potiphar recognised Joseph's competency and 'put him in charge of all

¹³ GTCNI "The Reflective Practitioner" (Department of Education, Northern Ireland, 2007).

that he had,' (Genesis 39:4) a position that carried with it significant and wide-ranging responsibilities. However, overtime Joseph also came to the attention of Potiphar's wife who took an unwelcome sexual interest in him. Joseph resisted her advances and clearly articulated that what she wanted was sinful (Genesis 39:9) but eventually he was left with no option but to flee the household, later being arrested on false charges.

Joseph was thrown in jail, yet he did not despair. He continued to demonstrate his strength of character and competence, looking to God for wisdom and gaining the favour of his jailer who promoted Joseph to a leadership role within the prison (Genesis 39:21-23). In whatever circumstance Joseph found himself he offered his life and work to the Lord. He is an example of the way in which we should seek to carry out our work, allowing God to redeem even the most difficult of circumstances. In the book of Galatians, Paul writes, 'Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all' (Galatians 6:10), which is precisely what Joseph did for his masters and fellow prisoners.

Joseph remained in prison for two years until Pharaoh began to experience troubling dreams and called on Joseph to interpret them using his God given ability (Genesis 41:16). Despite not being trained in the means of interpreting dreams according to the practices in the ancient world of his time, Joseph relied on God and was able to surpass those who had gone before him.

Pharaoh recognised that God's spirit was with Joseph and he promoted him to second in command of Egypt (Genesis 41:37-45). He undertook his duties diligently, for example the first thing he did in his new role for Pharaoh was to conduct a survey of the land, 'Joseph...went through all the land of Egypt' (Genesis 41:46). He spent time getting to know the people and communities he was responsible for serving. He consistently relied on his God given wisdom and insights to guide his decision making and carried out his responsibilities with distinction, gaining

the trust of the Egyptian people and Pharaoh (Genesis 41:55). This brought with it significant reward for Joseph, both economically and socially. It would have been tempting for him to forget his faith and cultural heritage, but Joseph remained true to himself, remembering what God had taught him from an early age. Joseph's story points towards someone who was more concerned with getting on with the job than personal reward. Throughout his story we see someone focused on the needs of others, consistently working for the good of the Egyptian people. During the 7 years of plenty, Joseph had the foresight to create reserves which he was then able to administer to the benefit of the people during the 7 years of famine (Gen. 41:48-49). This clearly demonstrates his competency in managing resources but also his ability to deal with challenging social and physical conditions. His professionalism and diligence are an example to all educators, pointing towards the need to get to know the school community in which they are called to serve and the importance of stewardship in how we handle resources, especially during these times of budget austerity.¹⁴

These are challenging economic times in the United Kingdom and those working in education often find themselves on the frontline of addressing poverty and its consequences in the lives of children and their families. Christian teachers should work, as Joseph did, towards reducing poverty and its impact, whilst acknowledging that things will not be completely restored until Christ comes again. The task is not always easy and it is vital to rely on God for help, looking to the example of Joseph and holding on to God's promise that He 'will never leave you or forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5).

¹⁴ Secretary of State James Brokenshire published indicative figures for a budget he proposed that would impose a 2.5% cut in the education budget representing a loss of £50m in real terms. BBC website 25 April 2017.

Over time it would have been easy for Joseph to become arrogant and self-reliant. But just as he had relied on God during the difficult times in his life, he continued to rely on God during the good times and acknowledge that his success was dependent upon the goodness of God, “Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, for, he said, God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house. The second he named Ephraim, for God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes” (Genesis 41:51-52). This is a clear example of Joseph’s willingness to acknowledge that it was God who blessed and equipped him for the work He had called him to. Joseph’s spiritual life and his work life is an example of the way in which our God-given gifts and professional competency should be fully integrated. If we start with commitment to work first and foremost for God, then it will be easier to keep our hearts right and minds focused on His calling for our lives.

Adapting some of the key observations about Joseph from the Theology of Work (TOW) Project, I would like to suggest the following key applications for student teachers:

1. Commit yourself to God first and then expect him to direct and establish your plans.
2. Pray that God would give you wisdom in all the decisions you will make now and in the future.
3. Acknowledge the gifts God has given you and use them to serve others.
4. Get to know the community and the people connected to your school.
5. Grow in knowledge and understanding so that you can excel in your work.
6. Work to practically meet the needs of the children in your care, knowing that God has placed you in the classroom to be a blessing.
7. If extra responsibilities and promotion come your way, never forget that your first mission is to be God’s servant.
8. Even in difficult and challenging circumstances do not assume that you are out of God’s will, ask Him to show you how to faithfully serve him in the dark places.

Lessons from the Life of Daniel

Daniel was a young man whose courage was under fire. He too stands as a wonderful example of how God can strengthen and equip His people to carry out their work in ways that honour Him and serve others. His life story offers hope for young teachers entering the profession at a time when the dominant culture is more secularised than ever before, when they are wondering how best to follow God and thrive in the changing contexts of many schools.

Daniel was exiled from Jerusalem when God's people were conquered by the Babylonian Empire and was forced to live out his life in an environment very hostile to God. Daniel faced a dilemma: should he withdraw from the corrupt Babylonian system, relegate his faith to the private realm and quietly get on with his life without drawing attention to himself, or should he seek ways in which to serve the Babylonian King whilst remaining faithful to God? Daniel chooses the latter, finding a way to rise through the ranks to a prominent position within the Babylonian government whilst remaining publicly devoted to God. His story is an example of the importance of understanding one's own identity and calling as a follower of Christ in the midst of culture that is hostile to God's truth and authority.

Daniel was constantly exposed to new ways of thinking about the world during his time in Babylon. He was surrounded by ideas and practices that would have been very alien to a devout Jew. But Daniel found a way to embrace the opportunities he had, whilst being careful to guard his spiritual life by setting clear boundaries on what he was prepared to do. For example, he declined the rich diet offered to all the trainees, refusing to 'defile himself' (Daniel 1:8). The result was that Daniel and his friends exceeded the physical development of the other trainees, not because of their genius or their diet, but because 'God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom' (Daniel 1:17). Daniel's wisdom came from God and we are told that "in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them,

he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom” (Daniel 1:20). This set the pattern for the remainder of the book as time and again events display the superiority of Daniel’s wisdom — and more importantly, the power of his God (Daniel 5:14; 11:33-35; 12:3, 10).

There may be occasions when teachers feel torn between the demands of the system or their employers and their Christian faith. Daniel’s life and work stands as another striking example of how to be excel professionally whilst remaining faithful to God. Daniel knew his boundaries because he knew what God required of him. The circumstances that Daniel and his friends faced whilst living as exiles and strangers in Babylon, are a reminder of the privileged position that Christianity currently holds in Northern Ireland’s education system. However, as postmodernism advances, it is likely that calls for a more secular education system will increase. Daniel’s life offers guidance and hope for Christian teachers grappling with the challenges of working in a more secular environment. The table below highlights some key passages from the book of Daniel and offers some application for teachers seeking to be faithful to God in the context of school.

Table 8. Lessons from the Book of Daniel

Passage	Application
Daniel 1:11-14 Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: “Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days.	Daniel and his friends knew what God required of them and approached the situation with wisdom and humility. They suggested an alternative way of doing things and trusted the results to God.
Daniel 1:20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom.	God’s wisdom and truth far exceeds earthly wisdom. As Christian teachers partner with God in their work, they will be provided with insight and knowledge that they can use in the service of all.

Table 8. Lessons from the Book of Daniel (continued)

<p>Daniel 2:47-48 The king said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery. Then the king promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon.”</p>	<p>The witness of Christian teachers can make a real difference in the workplace, helping to bring the light of Christ to difficult situations.</p>
<p>Daniel 5:17 Then Daniel answered in the presence of the king, “Let your gifts be for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else! Nevertheless, I will read the writing to the king and let him know the interpretation.”</p>	<p>Daniel sought to serve the interests of others without seeking reward for himself.</p>
<p>Daniel 6:3 Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king planned to appoint him over the kingdom.</p>	<p>Christians should seek to carry out their work with professionalism and asking God to help them excel in what they do in order to bring glory and honour to Him.</p>
<p>Daniel 6:10 Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God.</p>	<p>Being prayerful helped Daniel achieve great things. His primary focus was his relationship with God and he was steadfast in honouring the Lord, even though it could have cost him his job or even his life.</p>
<p>Daniel 6:16 Then the king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions.</p>	<p>God does not promise a life free from trial and stress. Christians will face trials of many kinds in the workplace, reliance on God is the best protection.</p>
<p>Daniel 12:1 At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish but at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.</p>	<p>Christian teachers must hold onto the great eternal hope that they have in Jesus, knowing that ultimately, He will redeem all things.</p>

There is much wisdom for student teachers in the lives of Joseph and Daniel, especially within the context of an increasingly secular society. The Old Testament as a whole contains much wisdom on the subject of work and labour. Work is intended to be a gift or a blessing but sadly, as a consequence of the Fall, it has become more of a struggle rather than the labor of love God intended it to be. Holding these two perspectives on work in tension, may help student teachers prepare for the joys and challenges that await them in the classroom.

Work in the New Testament

The New Testament is also full of references to work which are full of significance for those engaging in the task of teaching and seeking to pass the Christian faith on to the next generation. In I Corinthians, Chapter 10 it says, 'So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Corinthians 10:31). As in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5), it is clear God's people are called to live fully integrated lives, in which work cannot be separated from their relationship with God and others.

The Gospels

As in the Old Testament, the Gospels also contain a number of references to individuals who are identified by their vocation. In some instances, an individual's name is provided with their vocation:

Table 9. Named individuals in the Gospels identified by their vocation

Name	Vocational Description
Simon and Andrew	the fishermen (Matthew 4:18)
Matthew and Zacchaeus	the tax collectors (Matthew 9:9; 10:3; Luke 19:1)
Malchus	the servant (John 18:10)

At other times people are referred to solely by their vocation:

Table 10. Unnamed individuals in the Bible identified by their vocation

Vocation/Work Activity	Passage
angels appear to shepherds	Luke 2:9
Jesus and the disciples encounter people "tending pigs"	Luke 8:34
Jesus and his disciples ate with tax collectors	Matt. 9:10
Peter disowns Jesus after being confronted by a servant girl	Luke 22:56

This repeated pattern of identifying people by their vocation in the New Testament, again emphasizes the value God places on work. It confers dignity on a wide range of professions, not simply those related to religious service. Jesus interacted with all sorts of people who had all

sorts of jobs, often surprising the religious establishment along the way. Jesus regularly challenged people to transform the ways in which they were working. Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10) was challenged to run his financial enterprise based upon high moral and ethical standards. The disciples found that despite their initial misgivings by listening to Jesus' advice about fishing they were able to increase their productivity dramatically with a miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-14). Christians must allow Jesus to speak into their working lives, so that He can bring about transformation and blessing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus and Work

The only passage in which there is a direct reference to Jesus' profession is found in Mark's Gospel, when the writer explains that the people asked: 'Isn't this the carpenter?' (Mark 6:3). So, we get little insight into how Jesus viewed his work before beginning his public ministry, however it makes sense that the Creator in human form chose to undertake work in which creativity and skill are fundamental attributes. Whatever work we do, we should seek to do it creatively putting God-given gifts and abilities to good use in the service of others. For teachers being creative enough to keep the attention of twenty-five to thirty pupils, day after day can be exhausting and the ideas can soon dry up. Christian teachers who rely on the Holy Spirit to inspire them in their daily work, will never run out of ideas and will be able to fill their classrooms with God's creativity and joy.

Jesus had another job description that went well beyond his work as a carpenter.¹⁵ When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to give birth to a son, he also gave her Jesus' job description - "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord

¹⁵ Aaron Kuecker, "Theology of Work," *Theology of Work Project*, June 30, 2017, accessed August 18, 2017, <http://www.theologyofworkproject.org>.

God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). The work of the King is described as follows: performing mighty deeds, scattering the proud, bringing down rulers from their thrones, lifting up the humble, filling the empty with good things, sending the rich away empty, helping Israel, and showing mercy to Abraham’s descendants (Luke 1:51-55).

In this section of scripture referred to as the Magnificat, Jesus as a King is portrayed as exercising economic, political, and perhaps even military power but Christ offers a very different way of ruling. He does not oppress His people. His kingdom is a rich harvest field, full of good things for all people. He keeps His people protected and those who repent are shown mercy. This stands in stark contrast to the standards of most earthly rulers who seek after their own interests at the expense of their people. Jesus is motivated by a different set of values. Quoting the prophet Isaiah he says of himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19). His concern is not only for people in desperate need, He cares for all people everywhere, regardless of their station or condition.

In terms of His earthly work and ministry, the Gospels most frequently refer to Jesus as a teacher and the other terms used to describe Him as ‘Lord/Master’ and ‘Rabbi’, both also have clear pedagogical associations.¹⁶ Charles Melchart, in describing Jesus as a wise teacher, provides a long list of teaching tools Jesus used to pass on wisdom: folk and literary proverbs; numerical sayings; riddles; rhetorical questions; beatitudes; admonitions and instructions; and perhaps most well-known of all, parables. Often the wisdom that Jesus shared with people,

¹⁶ Charles Melchart, *Wise Teaching: Biblical wisdom and educational ministry* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

went well beyond conventional wisdom, e.g. ‘Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you’ (Matthew 6:22).

The parables Jesus told made use of everyday experiences with which his listeners were familiar but which challenged them to see things differently, offering new perspective. He often left people with open ended questions, designed to help them think for themselves, rather than simply providing them with all of life’s answers. For those training to be teachers, the techniques that Jesus uses in sharing the parables could fill a modern text book on pedagogical practices but the example of Christ as a teacher, extends well beyond techniques and being able to tell good stories.

Jesus models what he teaches. His words and actions match, there is a deep integrity within his teaching. This is illustrated beautifully in the account of Jesus washing His disciple’s feet. After he was done, he said to them, “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet” (John 13:13-14). John Shortt comments, that the training Jesus gave his followers was based on an apprenticeship model in which he sought to apply their understanding of earthly work to their Kingdom work. ‘Fishermen were to become fishers of men, farmers were to become labourers in God’s vineyard or harvest field.’¹⁷ Christian teachers should teach in ways that reflect the example of Christ in their classroom and study the wisdom contained in the Gospels, allowing it to shape them as individuals and practitioners.

Paul and Work

Paul’s writings contain much instruction when it comes to a Christian understanding of work. The focus of his teaching in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 7 is that our primary concern should be

¹⁷ John Shortt and David Smith, *The Bible and The Task of Teaching* (Nottingham, UK: Stapleford Centre, 2002), 75.

to work out our calling to follow Jesus, wherever we find ourselves. 'Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him' (1 Corinthians 7:20). The Reformers took this as an instruction against social mobility, however Gordon Fee helpfully reflects that,

The call to Christ has created such a change in one's essential relationship (with God) that one does not need to change in other relationships (with people). These latter are transformed and given new meaning by the former. Thus, one is no better off in one condition than in the other.¹⁸

Paul believes that it does not matter where people find themselves, the task of the Christian is to serve God wherever they are. For teachers, it can be tempting to think that changing class or school will make it easier to serve Christ but Paul is reminding his readers of the need to focus on their call to follow Christ and seek to be salt and light wherever He has placed them. This can be hard but holding to a biblical perspective of work will help students to develop a professional resilience that will help them to overcome challenges and hardships as they come.

Paul makes this point again in some of his other letters. For example, in Colossians, Chapter 3, he writes, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3 3:23-24). Tom Wright has commented on these verses, "The task may appear unimportant or trivial, but the person doing it is never that, and he or she has the opportunity to turn the job into an act of worship."¹⁹

Alistair Mackenzie, founding director of Faith at Work New Zealand summaries Paul's teaching on work in five clear points. Firstly, all work is of value and significance, regardless of the status or lack of status attached to it by the surrounding culture. Secondly, there is no

¹⁸ Gordon Fee, *I Corinthians, New International Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 307.

¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon, New International Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 149-50.

hierarchy of tasks in God's economy. As Eugene Peterson writes: "Any work done faithfully and well is difficult. It is no harder for me to do my job than for any other person, and no less. There are no easy tasks in the Christian way; there are only tasks which can be done faithfully or erratically, with joy or resentment."²⁰ Thirdly, work is a part of our calling but not the sum total of it. Our primary calling is to follow Christ and live as His disciple. Reflecting on Paul's teaching about work, Paul Stevens says "the New Testament treats work in the context of a larger framework: the call of God to live totally for him and his kingdom. Therefore, Paul was not, strictly speaking, a bi-vocational missionary, but rather mono-vocational by integrating daily work with all aspects of his kingdom life." Fourth, we are to find ways of connecting our work with our calling to follow Jesus, serving him in all we do. For example, in Colossians Paul writes, 'As you learn more and more how God works, you will learn how to do your work' (Colossians 1:10, The Message). Peterson writes, "In every letter St Paul wrote he demonstrated that a Christian's work is a natural, inevitable and faithful development out of God's work. Each of his letters concludes with a series of directives which guide us into the type of work that participates in God's work."²¹ Fifth, Stevens comments that laziness and sloth are not consistent with the Christian calling, (Ephesians 4:28; 2 Thessalonians 3: 10-13) work gives people dignity and purpose. Tim Keller offers the following simple definition of work "Rearranging the raw materials of a particular domain to draw out its potential for the flourishing of everyone."²²

This is the command given to Adam and Eve in the garden and it is the command given to all believers regardless of the type of job they do, including teachers. Picking up on imagery from the Garden of Eden and Paul's contention that Christians are to serve God wherever they

²⁰ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 104.

²¹ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 104.

²² Tim Keller, "Work" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NYC, September 24, 2007).

find themselves, Haddon Robinson encourages Christians to 'Bloom where you are planted.'²³

This lovely phrase connects the vision of work in the Old and New Testaments in a way that speaks of beauty and hope, implying that there is more to work than simply completing daily tasks.

Christian Vocation

Throughout the centuries, Christians have disagreed on the meaning and definition of the word *vocation*. Opinions range from the idea that daily work is 'just a job', to the idea that work is fulfilling a specific 'call and purpose' that God has given a believer to do with their life. The reason for this range of opinions surrounding the notion of vocation is that the Bible offers two very different pictures of work.²⁴ Genesis 2:15 paints the picture of a beautiful garden which Adam is 'to till and keep', there is a sense of blessing and ease to his work. After Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, work is characterised by struggle: Adam will only eat 'in toil' and 'by the sweat of your face' (Genesis 3:17,19). The experience of work as both a blessing and a curse is the experience of many believers, at times it brings a sense of fulfilment giving our lives meaning in the service of God, at other times it is simply a necessity to put food on the table and pay the bills.

'Vocation' is the Latin word for 'calling' – and the two words are often used interchangeably. This adds to the confusion or lack of clarity in defining what is meant by vocation today. In the Old Testament, the language of 'call' comes through very strongly when we think of the way in which God calls the Israelites, the prophets, and the rulers to do His will.

²³ Haddon Robinson, "Introduction to the Theology of Work Project", *Theology of Work*, accessed August 22, 2017 <https://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/haddon-robinson-introduction-to-the-theology-of-work-project>.

²⁴ William C. Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 34.

In the New Testament the word *klesis*, 'calling' is used eleven times, mostly in letters by Paul or those influenced by him, consistently refers to God's call to a life of faith.²⁵ In 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Paul writes "We always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call." In 1 Corinthians 1:26 he reminds the believers to "Consider your own call...not many of you were wise by human standards, not many powerful, not many were of noble birth." The call to which both these passages are referring is the call to be a Christian. It is tempting to conclude therefore that calling in the Bible refers to the initial call to faith or a very specific call given by God, to individuals to carry out specific or special tasks. When Christian calling is limited in this way, there is a danger that believers will struggle to integrate their faith and work, which fails to reflect the command in Deuteronomy 6:5, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength' or Colossians 3:23, 'Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters.' Whilst this second passage does not include the word call, it places all work that believers are involved in within the context of their Christian calling or vocation.

In his book *The Call*, OS Guinness writes, "calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service."²⁶ For Christians their primary calling is to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,' (Deuteronomy 6:5) these are the words Jesus quotes when he is asked what is the greatest commandment. Guinness makes a distinction between this primary calling and our secondary callings stating, "Our primary calling as followers of Christ is by Him, to

²⁵ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 4.

²⁶ OS Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 4.

Him, and for Him...Our secondary calling, considering who God is as sovereign, is that everyone, everywhere, and in everything should think, speak, live, and act entirely for Him.”²⁷

The Reformation and Vocation

Five Hundred years ago, the Reformers challenged a narrow view of calling and vocation by putting forward a broad vision for the Christian doctrine of work. Luther and Calvin emphasised that Christians are called to God Himself, through the Gospel of Christ. Luther stressed the biblical idea of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ and encouraged people to view their job as their calling or vocation stressing that the Christian doctrine of vocation limited to priests or monks.

The Reformers made a distinction between vocation/calling and occupation. A believer’s occupation was viewed as an opportunity through which they could fulfil their God-given vocation/calling, through their everyday work. Work was not considered equal to calling but was viewed as providing important avenues through which Christians could partner with God to bring about the extension of His Kingdom on earth. Paul Stevens comments, “the New Testament treats work in the context of a larger framework: the call of God to live totally for him and his kingdom.”²⁸

The work of believers holds a significance that goes far beyond the visible results of that work. The Bible does not distinguish between spiritual and temporal work or sacred and secular forms of work. For teachers this highlights the significance of the work they do in in the classroom as extending well beyond academic knowledge to something which is much richer, with the power to touch the soul of every child in their care. The work of the Christian teacher is

²⁷ Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*, 6.

²⁸ Paul Stevens, *Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 22.

an act of worship that glorifies God and serves the common good. Alister McGrath notes that Calvin's English follower William Perkins put it like this, 'The true end of our lives is to do service to God in serving of man.'²⁹

How then do we then define work from a Biblical perspective? John Stott defined work as 'the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfilment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God.'³⁰ Dorothy Sayers believed that Christians should see their work "not as a necessary drudgery to be undergone for the purpose of making money, but as a way of life in which the nature of man should find its proper exercise and delight and so fulfil itself to the glory of God. That it should, in fact, be thought of as a creative activity undertaken for the love of the work itself; and that man, made in God's image, should make things, as God makes them, for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing."³¹

Christians should be in no doubt that their everyday work matters profoundly to God. It is the responsibility of the believer to develop talents and abilities God has given them, imitating God's own creativity. During the Reformation, the Protestant church understood this bigger vision of work, embracing the arts, literature and music in new ways, resulting in a period of significant cultural and social influence. Recovering the Christian doctrine of vocation and embracing a broader vision of work may help Christian teachers to find greater fulfilment and purpose within their everyday work.

²⁹ Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing: 2006) 287.

³⁰ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke, UK: Marshalls, 1984), 162.

³¹ Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1974), 89.

Catholic Education and Vocation

Given the religious, social and cultural context of Northern Ireland, it seems important to reflect on the Catholic Church's position on vocation, specifically as it relates to education. Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's, Catholic theology has also begun to embrace the idea that any job can be a vocation. *Gravissimum Educationis* the key document to emerge from Vatican II in relation to education. Niall Coll writes,

It begins by locating Christian education within the context of the church's mission to evangelise all peoples. To Christian faith, nothing human is alien – hence the church's interest in and commitment to every field of knowledge and study that contributes to human flourishing.³²

The role of the teacher is seen as contributing to the church's mission as 'by their lives and their teaching, they are called to be witnesses to the teacher, who is Christ.'³³ Pope Francis has called on educators to see their role as a vocation, and not just a profession, and he has spoken of the need to give young people a profound sense of hope.³⁴ If teachers are to go beyond simply passing on subject knowledge and embrace a wider biblical understanding of their work as an outworking of their Christian vocation, there is a need to pay attention to resourcing the faith formation of Catholic educators if they are to be fruitful in their role in school. Miller writes there is a need "to be effective bearers of the church's educational tradition, laypersons who teach in Catholic schools need a religious formation that is equal to their professional formation."³⁵

³² Niall Coll, *Ireland and Vatican II: Essays Theological, Pastoral and Education* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2015), 168.

³³ Vatican II, *Gravissimum Educationis* N.8.

³⁴ Pope Francis, "Education Cannot be Neutral," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 29, 2014.

³⁵ M.J. Miller "Challenges facing catholic schools: a view from Rome" in *International Handbook of Catholic Education: Challenges for School Systems in 21st Century* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007): 449-480.

Teacher Education and Vocation

Within Northern Ireland the type of formation Miller is advocating for is available for student teachers at the Catholic Teacher Training College, St. Mary's University College as an integrated part of their Initial Teacher Training degree. Student teachers at Stranmillis can undertake a Certificate in Religious Education but currently this is only available via distance learning.

Currently there is no provision for students at Stranmillis to undertake a course which includes an element of faith formation in relation to their vocation as teachers. Working alongside the Christian Union, I will design and deliver a series of seminars for Stranmillis students exploring the connections between their Christian faith and classroom practice. This will be a first step in paying attention to the Christian formation of student teachers in the college. The seminars will explore Biblical teaching on the topic of work, the doctrine of vocation, characteristics and values of teachers and the integration of Christian practices within the school classroom.

Niall Coll in his book *Ireland and Vatican II* argues "It is difficult for those involved in Catholic Primary Schools to navigate the contemporary context if they have little or no formation in the vision that inspires their educational endeavour."³⁶ This concern should apply to all Christians involved in religious education within schools or who have a desire to authentically live out their faith within the context of their role as teachers. 1 Peter, Chapter 3, provides some inspiration for the necessity of student teachers to have an understanding of the relationship between their call to Christ and their calling to be a teacher – "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

³⁶ Coll, *Ireland and Vatican II*, 200.

In an increasingly secular postmodern society all Christian teachers should have the opportunity to explore the relationship between their faith and professional formation. Coll argues that in order to engage in meaningful dialogue amongst a plurality of educational voices, it is necessary to have clarity and confidence about one's own mission and ethos.³⁷ Here it is clear that Catholic Schools and indeed Catholic Teacher Education which has the edge over their colleagues in the Controlled Sector, where a clearly articulated theological vision of education. My colleague at Stranmillis, David Armstrong writes 'The Protestant churches need to articulate a theology of education which underpins their educational concerns.'³⁸

Since Armstrong's article was published in 2011, a new body serving the interests of Controlled Schools in Northern Ireland has been established - the Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC). CSSC was setup after extensive lobbying on the part of the three largest Protestant churches, through the TRC. The rationale was to protect the needs and interests of these schools including their ethos and values, in much the same way as the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) looks after the interests and ethos of Catholic Schools. The challenge for CSSC, is that the Protestant churches have failed to provide adequate clarity concerning the theological vision of education. It therefore falls on individual Christian Principals and teachers to articulate and nurture a distinctive Christian ethos within their schools, without in many cases any formal theological education or professional faith formation. It is for this reason that providing an opportunity for Christian students to explore the Biblical and theological foundations of teaching as an expression of Christian vocation is so important.

³⁷ Coll, *Ireland and Vatican II*, 295.

³⁸ David Armstrong, "Thinking About Faith schools: An Evangelical Protestant Perspective," *Le Cheile*, 15, 1 (May 2011): 44-45.

Vocational Challenges in the Postmodern Era

Hugh Whelchel suggests that today few evangelical Christians understand that the Bible teaches there is no separation between the secular and the sacred.³⁹ He points out that the teachings of great reformers such as Calvin and Luther, who challenged the idea of the spiritual estate and argued for the 'Priesthood of all Believers', are unknown or neglected. In the postmodern era this lack of understanding is exacerbated by the way in which even committed Christians are placing limits on the areas of their lives that they allow to be shaped by biblical and theological truth. Postmodern subjectivity means that emerging adults place often place limits on their faith or set it aside depending on the social or cultural setting in which they find themselves.

Personal desires and individual choices have been elevated above the Scriptures, so that the lives of believers both outside and inside the church are dominated by an unending array of options, in which ease and comfort dominate. When combined with the powerful influences of the consumerist culture in which emerging adults have grown up, the challenges in respect of developing a strong sense of vocation are even greater. In the postmodern world, the wisdom of the great Reformers such as Calvin and Luther in respect of Christian vocation is largely unknown or neglected.

Thomas Bergler in his book *Juvenilization of the American Church*, expresses deep concerns about the impact that consumerism is having on the church claiming that 'consumerism and juvenilization of the church reinforce one another.'⁴⁰ The result can be a dangerous pick and mix spirituality, in which work may or may not be considered as an essential expression of a Christian's calling. In Steve Bruce's book *Religion in Modern Britain: From*

³⁹ Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 4.

⁴⁰ Thomas Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 28.

Cathedral to Cult, he concludes that the British have not become any less 'religious' but are instead moving to a place where they pick and choose the parts of 'religion' that appeal to them most. Bergler's assertion that juvenilized Christianity is self-centred, emotionally driven, and intellectually shallow would seem to support Bruce's critique of faith in modern Britain. A significant consequence of this culture within the church means that the climate in which youth discipleship is taking place leaves many emerging adults who have grown up in the church, very unsure as to how their faith relates to their work and with little or no understanding of the doctrine of vocation.

The secularisation of work in the hearts and minds of twenty first century believers means that they are all the more likely to approach work from within a postmodern paradigm in which consumerism and individualism dominate their value systems. In this type of culture, the temptation is to simply view work as a means to acquiring wealth. If emerging generation student teachers to view their work in the classroom as more than an opportunity to gain financial reward, they need to be taught about the Christian doctrine of vocation.

A recent conversation with a Christian student at Stranmillis highlighted a poor understanding of vocation and the relationship between the calling to serve Christ and the job of a teaching. The student told me that he wasn't sure he wanted to teach in a school when he graduated because he felt he would have 'a lot more opportunities to serve God, working for a church as a youth worker.' He finished our conversation by saying 'I just want to tell people about Jesus!'

Two things struck me about what he said. Firstly, he seemed to have little knowledge of the responsibilities and opportunities afforded to him in relation to teaching Religious Education in school and secondly, he seemed to believe that being a church youth worker meant he would be working for God and that if he got a teaching position he would not be working for God. Alice

Matthews in a discussion with Haddon Robinson about the Theology of Work Project in 2014,⁴¹ cautioned that today's believers must be careful not to reduce the doctrine of vocation or calling to a limited number of ecclesiastical or missionary roles. It seems clear that the language being used and teaching about the importance of work in the modern church is lacking. Miroslav Volf laments:

Amazingly little theological reflection has taken place about an activity which takes up so much of our time. The number of pages theologians have devoted to transubstantiation—which does or does not happen on Sunday—for instance, would, I suspect, far exceed the number of pages devoted to the work that fills our lives Monday through Saturday.

Sadly, this is not a new problem. After World War One, Dorothy Sayers wrote extensively about the lack of vocational understanding in the church,

In nothing has the Church so lost her hold on reality as in her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular works is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends.⁴²

Sayers argued, that when the truth claims of Christianity are considered to be subjective or faith is privatised, God's people fail to connect their faith with all of life. She also asked the question 'How can anyone remain interested in a religion that seems to have no concern with nineteenth of his life?'⁴³ Critiquing the Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter as usually being confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly on Sundays. Sayers believed that the Church should be telling him 'that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.'⁴⁴

⁴¹ Alice Matthews, "Introduction to The Theology Of Work," *Discover the Word* (MP3 podcast), accessed 22 August, 2017, <https://Soundcloud.Com/Theology-Of-Work/Sets/Discover-The-Word>.

⁴² Sayers, *Creed and Chaos*, 102.

⁴³ Sayers, *Creed and Chaos*, 106.

⁴⁴ Sayers, *Creed and Chaos*, 106.

For many Christians work has simply become a means to an end, a way to fund their consumerist lifestyles or fund expensive leisure activities. Without realising it Christians are buying into the pagan idea that work is bad and leisure is good, the exception being full time Christian ministry, in which case their work is viewed as mission. This reinforces the sacred/secular divide which the Reformers sought to correct and Luther condemned in his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*,⁴⁵ calling it 'pure fiction' and reminding Christians that we are all 'a royal priesthood and a priestly realm' (1 Peter 2:9). All work can and should be considered as fulfilment of a Christians calling, regardless of whether they work in the church, the school classroom or parachurch ministry. We need to break down the wall between the sacred and the secular. We must help those who are Christ followers 'to remember the workday and to keep it holy.'⁴⁶

Faith and Work Movement

In recent years, the church has come alive to the need to address the importance of work in the lives of believers. The Faith and Work Movement (FAW), through organisations such as Redeemer Presbyterian's Centre for Faith and Work, The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (Fruitfulness on the Frontlines), The Washington Institute and the Oikonomía Network, have sought to help believers view their work as part of the cultural mandate and develop an understanding of work as an expression of Christian calling.

In exploring the idea of calling in *Every Good Endeavour* Keller points towards the Greek word *kaleo*, which means 'to call.'⁴⁷ Like Guinness, he emphasises the importance of the

⁴⁵ Luther, *Three Treatises*, 12.

⁴⁶ Haddon Robinson, "Introduction to the Theology of Work Project," *Theology of Work*, accessed August 22, 2017 <https://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/haddon-robinson-introduction-to-the-theology-of-work-project>.

⁴⁷ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 12.

believer's primary call into relationship with God through Christ (Romans 8:30; 1 Corinthians 1:9). And secondly their call to participate in God's mission as part of the church – ekklesia, literally meaning the 'ones called out.' Christians are called to integrate these two callings and use the gifts and talents God has given them in His royal service. If student teachers are to develop an understanding of how their role in the classroom is an expression of their Christian calling, they need to be provided with opportunities to examine what the Bible teaches about work, explore the idea of Christian vocation and consider the specific ways in which teachers can live out their Christian faith in the classroom.

It is this calling which requires believers to understand that all work they undertake is in service to God and an opportunity to live out their calling in whatever sphere God has placed them. Work is not equal to calling but is one of the most important means by which God uses to fulfil his purpose.⁴⁸ Christians are partners with God in His work. To be co-workers with and for God, implying the true value and significance of human work and its connection to God's work in the world. De Koster says, God's people are not only called to be ministers giving sermons but doctors to give medicine, teachers to impart wisdom, and so on.⁴⁹ They are to engage in the world, proclaiming and bringing the presence and rule of Christ over every part of it. Social critic Herbert Schlossberg states, 'The salt of people changed by the gospel must change the world.'⁵⁰ If Christian teachers and others are to do this then the starting point must be to understand the idea of vocation.

Christian teachers are called to live out their faith in the classroom but within a postmodern fragmented society in which truth is so contested many lack the understanding and confidence to share build their pedagogical practices upon the Christian worldview. They need

⁴⁸ Whelchel, *How Then Should We Work?*, 67.

⁴⁹ Lester DeKoster, *Work the Meaning of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Library Press, 1982), 34.

⁵⁰ Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 324.

to be supported in identifying their God-given talents and developing them in ways which enhance their professional skills and competencies in the classroom, so that their work as teachers might be an offering of worship to God and an opportunity to serve others. This is what has been described so eloquently by Frederick Buechner as, “The place God calls you to, is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”⁵¹

Despite the recent growth of the ‘Faith and Work’ movement in North America and the United Kingdom, it seems few emerging adults understand the significance of their everyday work. After almost 26 years spent in youth ministry at local church, denominational and national level, I remember very few Bible studies or events which explored biblical teaching on the subject of work. In my own congregation, the Discipleship Groups have regularly made use of the excellent materials available from LICC and as part of a Sunday evening series have recently completed the excellent Reframe Series, produced by The Centre of Faith and Work at Redeemer Presbyterian. However, the biblical content which underpins these great resources has yet to find its way into the church’s youth ministry curriculum. The result is that many young adults view church related work and missions as being more important or significant in the Kingdom of God than other professions such as teaching. As my conversation with the student highlighted.

If Christian students are to faithfully fulfil their role as religious educators and grasp the unique opportunities afforded to them by the Northern Ireland curriculum, then they must grasp the biblical truth and deep theological realities that Sayers was expressing. However, due to gaps within their own faith development and discipleship it appears many emerging generation students possess a limited view of the way in which their Christian faith connects to their professional role as teachers. “We need to break down the wall between the sacred and

⁵¹ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 119.

the secular. We must help those who are Christ followers to remember the workday to keep it holy.”⁵² This is of course is work that needs to be undertaken by the Church but it is also the responsibility of Christian faculty engaged in the professional preparation of emerging generation teachers, arguably they are best placed to help them develop a greater understanding of their calling and Christian vocation as teachers.

The nature of work in our world is rapidly changing, impacted by shifting cultural trends and changes to the socio-economic environment. The workplace, including schools are incredibly competitive environments in which results matter more than anything else. In education, the value of a teacher’s work is measured in terms of the exam results of their pupils and the position of their school on government league tables.

Yet questions about the nature and value of work have existed for many centuries. In addition to ancient writers many of the leading names in sociology, political science and economics have sought to understand mankind’s relationship to work, including Adam Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Max Weber and many others. Tim Keller’s book *Every Good endeavour* looks at how Christians should connect their work to God’s plan for the world. Keller argues that we need to view our work within the framework of the grand Biblical narrative, *Creation > Fall > Redemption > Restoration*.

Christian Worldview in Teaching

Abraham Kuyper, the great Dutch statesman, theologian, and journalist famously said, ‘There is no square inch of territory in the whole universe over which Christ does not say this is

⁵² Haddon Robinson, “Introduction to the Theology of Work Project,” *Theology of Work*, accessed August 22, 2017 [https://www.theologyofwork.org /resources/haddon-robinson-introduction-to-the-theology-of-work-project](https://www.theologyofwork.org/resources/haddon-robinson-introduction-to-the-theology-of-work-project).

mine.’⁵³ This points to the need for understanding the Christian worldview if disciples are to locate their work and calling within the will and purposes of God.

The term ‘worldview’ from the German word *Weltanschauung*, means a comprehensive perspective from which all reality is interpreted. Albert Wolters in his excellent book, *‘Creation Regained’* defines it as a comprehensive framework of one’s basic beliefs about things.⁵⁴ Keller writes that “No one can really function in the world without some working answers to...big questions, and so, to provide answers, we adopt a world-story, a narrative that explains things – a worldview.”⁵⁵

Christian teachers should have knowledge and understanding of a biblical worldview within which they can locate their teaching, both in terms of its content and purpose. In *The Abolition of Man*, C.S. Lewis’s best-known public opinion essay about the state of education in mid twentieth century England, he argued that the most important questions of learning were being left out of the curriculum that was shaping British education. “We make men without chests and expect from them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.”⁵⁶ In other words education had become too narrow, focusing on the acquisition of intellectual knowledge, whilst neglecting important areas such as character and social development. Lewis understood education as being much broader because he understood the importance of both heart and mind in the biblical account of what it means to be human and what is needed for humans to flourish. His understanding of education was informed and guided by his biblical worldview.

⁵³ Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Acton Institute, 2011).

⁵⁴ Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

⁵⁵ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 164.

⁵⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009), 26.

A biblical worldview places the work of teachers within wider context of human history and the Gospel, by teaching that the meaning of life is to love God and love our neighbour and that the operating principle which must inform all the work of Christian teachers is servanthood.⁵⁷ All teachers are operating within a framework which provides answers and meaning to the children and young people they teach. They must also be aware of the variety of worldviews that are held or openly expressed by their pupils.

Understanding the world in light of the biblical narrative offers a truly unique worldview in which our identity, nature, problems and the solutions all rest upon humanity's relationship with God. The biblical worldview does not believe the answer to the world's problems lies, as Marx suggested, in freeing people from capitalist greed or as Freud suggested, by freely expressing our deepest desires but rather in acknowledging sin and the Lordship of Christ. As such Christianity is making universal truth claims that are the antithesis of postmodernism. However, God's big story, helps to make sense of everything, in a way that offers hope to all. This is why it is so important for Christian teachers to have a good understanding of the biblical worldview.

In summarising the biblical worldview, Albert Wolters offers four key movements within the grand narrative of scripture. Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. The table below summarises each movement within the biblical worldview and offers an application for Christian teachers seeking to integrate their faith and working lives.

Table 11. Biblical Worldview and Teaching

Movement	Biblical Explanation	Some Application to Teaching
Creation (Good)	God made the world and everything in it was good. Humans are made in His image.	Teachers should celebrate the uniqueness of every individual pupil, recognising their value and looking for the good.

⁵⁷ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 165.

Table 11. Biblical Worldview and Teaching (continued)

Fall (Broken)	Sin entered the world and contaminated every aspect of the world.	Children and young people know that the world they are living in is broken. They see it as they look around them, they feel it within themselves. Teachers should acknowledge this brokenness and refrain from trying to ignore it or hoping that it will get better on its own.
Redemption (Solution)	Jesus came to heal the world. He is the answer to the world's problems.	No matter how bleak the situation, Christian teacher can and must hold on to the hope that Jesus is able to mend that which is broken. This stands against the culture of despair that often exists within the profession that things are bad and they are going to get worse.
Restoration (Hope)	One day all things will be made new, when Jesus returns.	The issues facing teachers and pupils can be overwhelming at times, for the Christian teacher, their hope must rest on Jesus.

There are of course many, many more ways in which holding to a biblical worldview will help Christian teachers makes sense of the world and the work they do in schools. This might include work in the area of ethos and values, character development and curriculum content. But the starting point must be to provide Christian teachers with the opportunity to explore a biblical worldview for themselves during their initial teaching training. In doing so not only will they benefit from understanding how the grand narrative of scripture can and should shape their classroom practice but they will also gain a broader understanding of how important the integration of faith and work is too. Keller offers five ways in which a theology of the Bible can help shape an understanding of work.

1. "Faith gives you an inner ballast without which work could destroy you." One of the greatest gifts a teacher can give their pupils is to be resolutely confident of their own identity in Christ. In this way, they are protected from the need to win any popularity contests with those

they are trying to teach and will avoid the trap of success going to their head or failure seeping into their hearts.

2. “Faith gives you a concept of the dignity and worth of *all* work, even simple work, without which work could bore you.” When teachers do the simplest kinds of work, perhaps tying the shoe laces of a four-year-old in their class or helping a student fill out a simple form, they are, as Martin Luther wrote, “the fingers of God.” For Christian teachers, the work they do in school should be an offering to God, in which they offer of their best in the same way as Joseph did in Egypt and Daniel did in Babylon.

3. “Faith gives you a moral compass without which work could corrupt you.” Unless work is grounded in and guided by a moral framework, teachers may be tempted to take the easy way out by under preparing or perhaps choosing to ignore the needs of certain pupils.

4. “Faith gives you a world and life view that shapes the character of your work.” The nature of work undertaken by a Christian teacher should relate and connect into their views on human identity and what leads to human flourishing.

5. “Hope.” Christians teachers should seek to bring hope by pressing for cultural transformation within their schools and communities, whilst holding on to the ultimate hope that one day all things will be made new. Children, young people and their families need to see small signs of hope along the way. By celebrating small changes and improvements, teachers can increase the hope quotient within their classrooms and communities. The Gospel is about redemption, Christian teachers are called to get involved in this world in order that it and they, might be transformed by God.

Conclusion

Work is an expression of Christian discipleship and every believer has a responsibility to use the gifts and opportunities that God gives them to serve Him and see His Kingdom extended. In Luke it says, 'from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked' (Luke 12:42-48). This reaffirms the cultural mandate and the task of stewardship given to Adam in the Garden of Eden and of which Jesus speaks in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:20-23). In the parable, it is made clear that Master expects his servant to use the talents entrusted to him. For student teachers preparing to enter the profession, college should be a time of preparation in which they can identify the gifts and talents that God has given to them and how they can put them to use in the classroom.

We also must understand the tension that exists in the scriptures regarding work. Life is not meaningful without work, but it must not become the meaning of your life. Christians must find their identity in Christ, not in their work. However, for most work is the primary way in which believers can respond to God's call in on their lives, seeking to be salt and light in a tasteless and dark world. A healthy view of work will also include an understanding of the need for rest, prayer and reflection. God rested from his work on the seventh day and so should we. If Christian teachers are to maintain a healthy work they need to draw clear boundaries around their work in school, which can so easily become all consuming. In doing so they will help themselves and may help to change the culture within the system.

The Christian doctrine of work, teaches that God can transform the culture. God's purpose is not only to save individuals, but to redeem and restore the world that He created. Christian teachers can play a key role in building a society based upon God's love and values, impacting the culture and helping to make the world a better place for the next generation. To

do this they need to integrate their faith and work, by infusing their classrooms with the love of Christ and to do their work as teachers well.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, several key texts offering important insights that will inform this thesis-project will be reviewed. The material will provide a framework within which the findings of the thesis-project will be analyzed. The texts have been selected to cover the following areas: emerging adulthood; vocation; Christian teaching and learning.

The impact of postmodernity on the lives of emerging adults, their faith formation and their relationship with the church has been dramatic. Understanding this generation of student teachers is key to being able to provide them with an effective program of learning that will help equip them in integrating faith into their classroom practice. The work of Christian Smith¹ and David Kinnaman² will be reviewed for key learning concerning the characteristics of emerging adults and insights into their faith formation.

Crucial to students' ability to integrate faith into their classroom practice, is a good theological understanding of vocation. This will help them in navigating the paradox between the education system in Northern Ireland, which upholds the teaching of Christianity in schools, and the increasingly multi-faith and secular nature of wider society. Teachers who view their teaching career through a vocational lens will find purpose and meaning in their work, regardless of the cultural, social or physical environment in which they find themselves. Parker Palmer asserts that our true sense of vocation is not rooted in the external, he states "Vocation does not come from a voice 'out there' calling me to become something I am not. It comes from

¹ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell. *Souls in transition: the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34.

² David Kinnaman, *You lost me: why young Christians are leaving church ... and rethinking faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 78.

a voice 'in here' calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfil the original selfhood given me at birth by God."³ The theological perspectives on vocation will be provided by Keller⁴ and Garber,⁵ with Parker Palmer's book being drawn on to bring a specific focus on vocation within teaching.

Even in schools where the Christian faith is actively promoted, it cannot be assumed that Christians students will instinctively know how to practice Christian teaching. In relation to the Religious Education Curriculum, students may feel very unsure of church doctrine or lack confidence in how they should handle the Bible within the context of the classroom. In relation to other curriculum subjects, the absence of a coherent Christian worldview means many emerging adults will struggle relating their faith to the teaching of English, Maths, History, Science or Music. Without a Christian worldview, students lack a framework through which they can recognise as Abraham Kuyper did, 'There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!'⁶

To shine a light into this neglected area of Christian education, step David Smith and James K. Smith, who affirm the importance of developing Christian practices in teaching and the opportunities to develop distinctively Christian pedagogy across all subjects. Providing a connection between these two areas and Palmer's focus on the inner life of the teacher, John Shortt's book, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, offers some wonderful insights and practical advice for those who aspire to be Bible-Shaped in their ministry of teaching.⁷

³ Parker Palmer *Let Your Life Speak* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

⁴ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2012).

⁵ Steve Garber, *Visions of Vocation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁷ John Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014).

The aim of this literature review is to highlight some key insights from each author and reflect on how each of the texts have helped to shape the thinking which informs this thesis-project. In writing this chapter the contribution each text makes to the broader framework of the project was considered and how they relate a particular aspect of the research question. Firstly, what do we know about emerging adults and their faith formation? Secondly, what are the challenges that emerging generation student teachers face in integrating their faith and work? Thirdly, how can emerging generation student teachers develop an integral Christian approach to teaching and learning? The works to be highlighted within this literature review are listed below under the three broad headings of emerging adults; faith and work including vocation; and Christian teaching:

*You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church and Rethinking Faith*⁸ by David Kinnaman. Kinnaman is the president of The Barna Group, a private non-partisan research organization.

*Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*⁹ by Christian Smith with Patricia Snell. Smith is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology and Director (Snell is Associate Director) of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame.

David Kinnaman and Christian Smith have both conducted a significant amount of research into the lives of emerging adults and their faith development as they transition from adolescence into emerging adulthood.

⁸ David Kinnaman, *You lost me: why young Christians are leaving church ... and rethinking faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).

⁹ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Every Good Endeavour by Tim Keller. Keller was until recently Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York and has written extensively on culture, work and faith.

The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer. Parker J. Palmer is founder and Senior Partner of the Centre for Courage & Renewal.

Visions of Vocation by Steve Garber. Garber is Professor of Marketplace Theology and Leadership at Regent College. Previously, he was Principal of The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation, and Culture in Washington, D.C.

Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning by David I. Smith and James K.A. Smith. David I. Smith is Professor, Director of Graduate Studies in Education and Director of the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning at Calvin College. James K.A. Smith is Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, where he holds the Gary and Henrietta Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology and Worldview.

Bible Shaped Teaching by John Shortt. John Shortt is a senior adviser with European Educators' Christian Association, Professorial Fellow in Christian education at Liverpool Hope University and an Adjunct Professor at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Emerging Adults

You Lost Me

Kinnaman helps us to consider the loss of young adults from the church not simply in terms of numbers but to ask the deeper more challenging question, from what are we losing them? He goes beyond simply the headline figures about the dropout of young adults from the church and offers rich insights into the nature of young adults and the disconnect between their lived experience and what they experience within the church. As reported in Kinnaman's research with the Barna Group, there is a significant dropout amongst "young Christians – or

young adults who once thought of themselves as Christians – who have left the church and sometimes the faith.”¹⁰ But he points out that just because they are no longer in the church doesn’t mean they always walk away from their faith. The problem according to Kinnaman, is that as teenagers move into the transitional life stage of emerging adulthood, they find that the churches in which they were raised are no longer safe places in which they can wrestle with their doubts. So, they leave believing the institutional church has failed them.

It is precisely at this moment of transition into the world of emerging adulthood that students need to be supported through what Kinnaman refers to as “the great struggle – of this emerging generation...learning to live faithfully in a new context, to be in the world but not of the world.”¹¹ Students need help to navigate the new challenges they face as they begin college, encountering new people and new ideas for the first time, whilst also experiencing a massive increase in the amount of freedom they have to make their own choices.

They need to have spaces in which they can explore what it means to be a disciple in their context and have opportunities to put their faith into action, so that they are ‘not merely hearers of doctrine but doers of faith’.¹² Kinnaman argues that “We need new architects to design interconnected approaches to faith that encourage transference...eco systems of spiritual and vocational apprenticeships that can support deeper relationships and more vibrant faith formation.”¹³ He rightly acknowledges that this task cannot simply happen with the church, but that lots of other institutions, including education, have a significant influence on the faith development of young adults. Christian faculty are in a unique position to design new structures which allow them to get alongside students, supporting them as they make the transition from

¹⁰ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

¹¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

¹² Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 12.

¹³ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 14.

the youth group to young adulthood at college and acting as professional mentors, who can help them put their faith into action in the school classroom. Kinnaman encourages us to become Bonhoeffer-like leaders, demonstrating examples of cultural courage and kingdom centered community amongst students. At the heart of this will be helping them to understand their calling to be *in the world but not of the world* by living out their vocation as teachers. This is vital work if they are to embrace the opportunities that currently exist within Northern Ireland schools and teach the children in their care about Jesus and His Church.

Key to this will be Christian faculty who are committed to becoming architects of new spaces in which students can explore the Christian faith for themselves, before they seek to teach RE in their classroom. This will not only help them to become more effective teachers of Religious Education but will also help them to develop a more mature faith, making it more likely they will retain their faith during the four years they spend at college. This will help to address what Kinnaman notes are two of the biggest objections emerging adults express about Christianity – room for doubt or questions and putting their faith into action.

One particularly concerning doubt that Kinnaman identified as existing amongst both Protestant and Catholic twenty somethings, were their views about Jesus. Many hold very muddled thinking about Christ, expressing significant doubts about the miracles He performed and His resurrection. This resonates with research findings from the Warwick study in the UK,¹⁴ which found 'a reluctance to engage with the real core of the Christian faith such as Christian belief in Jesus as God incarnate'. Given the centrality of Jesus Christ to the Christian faith and the importance placed on Jesus within the Northern Ireland RE Curriculum, it is crucial that this

¹⁴ Robert Jackson, "Looking back over the last year: some ups and downs of 2009," *British Journal of Religious Education* 32, no. 1 (2010): 1-3.

lack of theological understanding is addressed.

In order for these efforts to be effective, we must understand the nature of emerging generations and the shape of their spiritual lives. Kinnaman acknowledges that there are some young adults who have retained their faith and remain actively involved in the life of their local church but for many others they are disconnected and have moved away from the churches in which they grew up. Kinnaman's three categories of young adults – Nomads; Exiles; and Prodigals, provide a useful description of the views and values of many young adults.

- *Nomads* walk away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians.
- *Prodigals* lose their faith, describing themselves as no longer Christian.
- *Exiles* are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between the culture and the church.

Kinnaman makes three general observations about young adults that are very helpful. Firstly, he reminds readers that every story matters. People are individuals and their faith journeys are personal. Secondly, the majority are not walking away from faith, they are putting their involvement in church on hold. They are struggling less with their faith in Christ than with their experience of church.¹⁵ It is not the task of faculty in non-faith based college to address institutional failings within the church but they can step into the lives of their students and help them hold onto Jesus in the midst of their doubts and wanderings. Thirdly, he acknowledges a countertrend in the data – young Christ followers who are passionate, committed and bursting to engage with the world for the sake of the Gospel. These teachers of the future are the ones that we must support in order to ensure that they do not experience a 'failure to launch' when it comes to putting their faith into practice, in the classroom or wherever else God may call them to serve Him. They may have plenty of passion, but Kinnaman acknowledges that, like most

¹⁵ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 27.

Christians, their knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and church history overall is poor. Undertaking teacher training in religious education, affords each of these groups the opportunity to explore the Bible, core Christian doctrine, church history, and theology for themselves. The question is if this knowledge and their commitment will be enough to help them stand firm amidst the waves of postmodernism or if they will be swamped by the prevailing culture.

Kinnaman outlines some key advice that can help emerging adults and the wider Christian community stand against the cultural challenges of our time.

Relationships

We know that relationships matter, the church has invested millions in employing youth workers focused on developing relationships with teenagers. But when an older teen moves out of the youth group or heads off to college, they often feel isolated from other adults in relation to their faith and spirituality. Kinnaman encourages us to rediscover the power of intergenerational relationships. If Christian students and faculty have the opportunity to connect on a spiritual level, both will be better equipped to stand firm against the cultural challenges confronting the teaching profession at this particular moment in history.

Vocation

Kinnaman poses a challenge to the Christian community by asking can it “summon the courage to prepare a new generation of professionals to be excellent in their calling and craft, yet humble and faithful where God has asked them to serve?”¹⁶ His critique of the church aligns with the pattern in Northern Ireland, where it is true that most young people receive little or no guidance on how to connect their vocational dreams with their faith in Christ. It is also true that the faith and work movement has had a significant impact on the discipleship in the Protestant churches in recent years within Northern Ireland. The work of Tim Keller, Mark Green and Neil

¹⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 30.

Hudson are regularly referred to within my own congregation and whilst working at denominational level I was aware of a rapid expansion of the number of conferences and training materials aimed at helping Christians integrate their faith and work e.g. *Frontlines*.¹⁷ This is to be welcomed but a gaping whole exists because we make the mistake of assuming that this type of conversation is for more mature Christians, rather than young people or young adults. Providing strategic opportunities for younger Christians to explore vocation whilst at college, means they will be better prepared on entering the workplace. Of course, many college students have absolutely no idea what field of work they will end up in, which does not mean to say they should not explore broad ideas about vocation and service. Here the work of Steve Garber and Keller will prove instructive. However, in the case of student teachers the opportunities to contextualize the conversations are unlimited, thereby offering student teachers the chance to explore their specific vocation whilst at college and connect to what Parker Palmer calls their inner life. By understanding their own identity, faith and vocation better, student teachers can enter the classroom more equipped to be effective witnesses for Christ.

Wisdom

Proverbs 9:10 says 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom', but in this technologically saturated, digital world young adults are more likely to turn to Google, You-Tube or Instagram, with no means of discerning how to wisely apply any acquired knowledge to their lives and the world.¹⁸ They have more access to information than ever before but fewer opportunities to be exposed to God's wisdom as they drift away from the church. For those young adults who remain in the church or connected to a Christian community through their college years, they too often fail to benefit from the collective wisdom of God's people, due to

¹⁷ Mark Greene, *Fruitfulness on the Frontlines* (London: London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, 2014).

¹⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 30.

the generation gap. So, anxious to keep young people interested in Christianity, churches and youth ministry organizations have designed programs which intentionally keep the generations apart in search of cultural relevance. The unintended consequence is that young adults have limited opportunities to benefit from the wisdom and experience of older Christians, at the very time in their lives when they need hear the honest stories of faith older Christians who have gone ahead of them and have wisdom to share.

Teaching in Northern Ireland is referred to as the 'Reflective Profession'. Teachers of all ages and stages are actively encouraged to reflect upon their practice and learn from their experiences good and bad. To reflect, is to grow in wisdom, and as Kinnaman puts it, 'Wisdom empowers us to live faithfully in a changing culture.'¹⁹ Who better to help student teachers, to faithfully live out their calling in the rapidly changing culture of schools than older Christian teachers and Education faculty who have gone ahead of them? Mature Christians need to testify to the ways in which God's Spirit is on the move in schools across this land through the lives of ordinary everyday disciples, who God has called to be teachers. As they testify, students will have increased opportunities to receive the wisdom they need to live wisely in the culture and understand how their work as teachers connects to God's mission in this world.

Souls in Transition

The title of Christian Smith's book captures two important dimensions of his research into young adults. Firstly, that they are at a point in their lives of significant social and cultural change as they transition from high school into the world of university or work. Secondly, they experience significant changes in their faith community and their sense of faith identity. They

¹⁹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 212.

are as his title says, 'Souls in Transition.' Smith identifies the factors and characteristics of emerging adulthood as follows:

This new phase of life is the product of a variety of social and technological changes, including the expansion of higher education, delays in the average age of marriage, transformation in the American and global economy, the growing readiness of many parents to extend material support to their children well after they leave home, and the development and easy access to a variety of affordable and relatively safe birth control technologies. As a result of these complicated social transformations, the transition from the teenage years to fully achieved adulthood has stretched out into an extended stage that is often amorphous, unstructured, and convoluted, lasting upward of 12 or more years.²⁰

Smith reasons that if young adults are to successfully navigate this transitional stage of life, they need to develop healthy relationships forged within strong communities and have the opportunity to engage with older adults who can help support them through the significant challenges of young adulthood. For students entering college straight from high school, the four years act as a foundation for this important life stage which can last in excess of twelve years. Viewing the college experience from this perspective underlines the important role that faculty can play in the professional, social and religious formation of emerging adult students.

For Christian students in danger of abandoning their faith during their time in college, creating spaces for them to connect relationally with Christian faculty and offer opportunities to explore ideas related to the integration of faith and work, their vocation and Christian approaches to teaching and learning should be encouraged.

Smith identifies six different types of young adults that are likely to be found on college campuses. His classification of young adults bares some similarities to those identified by Kinnaman in *You Lost Me*, where he labelled them *nomads, prodigals and exiles*. Smith's work on the different types is useful as it offers insights into how best Christian faculty might connect

²⁰ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 280.

relationally with young adults, in order to help them grow spiritually or develop their understanding of the Christian faith.

A brief note of caution must be made when it comes to interpreting the different types of young adults. Whilst providing broad categories is helpful for those seeking to understand young adults, both Kinnaman and Smith caution about adopting an overly simplistic means of categorizing people. Smith rightly states that “not every last person falls neatly within one category or other. Some people seem to straddle types, and others are simply very unique.”²¹

The six types Smith identifies are *committed traditionalists*, *selective adherents*, *spiritually open*, *religiously indifferent*, *religiously disconnected*, and *irreligious*. Each type will be defined and some general observations offered that will help to inform the broader questions posed within this thesis.

Six Types of Emerging Adults

Committed Traditionalists

Committed Traditionalists embrace a strong religious faith, whose beliefs they can reasonably well articulate and which they actively practice. Personal commitment to faith is a significant part of their identities and moral reasoning, and they are at least somewhat regularly involved in some religious group...They also seem to focus more on inner piety and personal moral integrity than say, social justice or political witness, and can keep their faith quite privatized.²²

Smith’s observations of Committed Traditionalists align with the profile of many young adult Christians in Northern Ireland, especially within the Protestant community. They show high levels of commitment and are comfortable in traditional churches in which the Bible is highly regarded and a ‘Gospel’ message is preached weekly because of the strong emphasis placed on

²⁰ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 166.

²¹ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 166-167.

individual or personal conversion. This contributes to a more privatized faith, which means that young adults may have had limited opportunities to practice an integrated faith beyond the narrow confines of church and their individual lives, before starting college. If young adults have not grown up in an environment in which social justice and serving others beyond the walls of the church is a regular expression of their Christian faith, then they may be less inclined to view their classroom as an opportunity to serve the wider community by looking after the social and material needs of their pupils, focusing more narrowly on their educational needs.

Smith's critique of the evangelical Protestant tradition is helpful in understanding the narrow individual view of salvation held by many committed traditionalists within Northern Ireland. He concludes that the centuries old, evangelical insistence on standing alone before a holy God, is accentuating emerging adults' radical individualistic tendencies when it comes to matters of faith and practice.²³ Their focus on faith as essentially a personal affair, mixed with a high degree of subjectivism means even the most committed traditionalists may be reluctant to get involved in sharing their Christian beliefs in the classroom. This makes it more challenging to help them view their professional role as teachers as an opportunity to share the Gospel or to engage in acts of social justice in the classroom as an expression of Christian mission. It is worth noting that Ravi Zacharias offers a broader cultural observation that faith is being privatized in response to changing cultural and demographic trends. In his book *Deliver Us From Evil* he notes that secularists argue that the only way to deal with increasingly plurality is to seek the removal of personal beliefs from public life altogether.²⁴

Selective Adherents

Selective Adherents believe and perform certain aspects of their religious traditions but neglect and ignore others. They are less serious and consistent about their faith than Committed Traditionalists, but more grounded and convinced about what they believe,

²³ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 290.

²⁴ Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil* (London: Word Publishing, 1998).

or at least know they should believe, than the Spiritually Open. Selective Adherents often have had fairly solid religious upbringings but as emerging adults are more discriminating than Committed Traditionalists about what they are willing to adopt of their religion's traditions and practices, some of which they think are outdated.²⁵

This group of emerging adults are reflecting broader trends within postmodernism and the impact it is having on many churches. In attempts to make the Gospel more palatable for 21st century people, shallow theology dominates and Scripture is reinterpreted, giving culture precedence over the authority of God's word. The impact of this is that many young adults have been raised using a 'cafeteria' approach to faith and are used to selecting the bits of Christianity which appeal to their own sensibilities, neglecting or rejecting other aspects which they feel are too restrictive or no longer relevant.

Kinnaman refers to this as moral pragmatism - the whatever works method grounded in postmodern philosophy. It might be expressed as follows:

- What is right for you may not be right for me.
- I do what I think is best, not what anyone else thinks is best.
- You are the only one who can determine what is right and what is wrong.
- There is no absolute truth.

When they face moral or ethical decisions, selective adherents will decide what to do based on the particular situation or context they find themselves in. In other words, their decision making is subjective rather than objective, reflecting postmodernism's rejection of absolute truth. They are less bound by the collective standards of their faith identity, rather they will decide what is likely to produce the most positive outcome for them as an individual; what will make the most people happy or create the least conflict; what they think their friends and family expect; or what they believe most other people would do.

²⁵ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 167.

Smith agrees with Kinnaman's critique, stating that there is a "strong individualistic subjectivism in the emerging adult religious outlook – that 'truth' should be decided by what seems right to individuals, based on their personal experience and feelings."²⁶ He points the finger at some cultural and structural failings within evangelicalism which in some cases refuses to acknowledge anything other than *sola scriptura* as holding truth. Clearly the problem is not with the Bible, the problem is that when you combine democratized Bible study with rampant individualism, those with little or no theological understanding risk misinterpreting the Bible to suit their own circumstances.

Smith's selective adherents lack a coherent Christian worldview. They are happy to retain the label Christian but have a very limited understanding of the grand narrative of Scripture or God's Story.²⁷ Their own story is what matters most. As they move away from home and enter college this group can easily become what Kinnaman labels 'nomads'- young adults with a Christian background, who are personally interested in God and religion, but not interested in a formal or institutional expression of that faith. They are reluctant to be labelled as belonging to a particular group or denomination, perhaps because they are unwilling to embrace the standards of that community or because they believe that they can work out their faith for themselves without the support of a Christian community. They are the group most likely to say they love Jesus but not the church, reflecting a very weak ecclesiology and limiting their participation in the mission of God by thinking they can go it alone. By way of contrast, Newbigin suggests that the Trinitarian nature of mission implies an important role for the Church.²⁸ Communication and community lie at the heart of the Trinity and therefore Newbigin

²⁶ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 168.

²⁷ Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

²⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (London: SPCK 1995), 76.

concludes communication and community must lie at the heart of Trinitarian mission. The call to conversion is a call to become part of a community and mission is a move from the church out into the world as the people of God. In this view, the whole purpose of the Church is to support the *Missio Dei* and church structures exist in order to serve the community in fulfilling that mission.

Having an understanding of the central role the church has in the mission of God, is essential if *selective adherents* are going to enjoy the blessings of belonging to the body of Christ and view their work in the classroom as an opportunity to participate in the mission of God. Given their scepticism and nomadic tendencies in relation to church involvement during their college years, this is a significant challenge. If while studying at Stranmillis they can experience Christian community, have opportunities to develop a more mature faith, including an understanding of Christian worldview and come to understand the centrality of the church in the mission of God, then perhaps they can begin to more fully embrace their faith and the missional call of God on their lives.

Spiritually Open

Spiritually Open emerging adults are not personally very committed to a religious faith but are nonetheless receptive to and at least mildly interested in some spiritual or religious matters...They probably believe in some kind of higher power but are not sure what that is or means.²⁹

This group of young adults reflects the comments of students who participated in a small focus group in college recently to discuss the Certificate in Religious Education. Whilst none of the students present identified personal faith as a factor in their reasons for undertaking the certificate (100% citing employability), they spoke with warmth and expressed a general interest in the content of the course. They also talked in positive terms about the religious education

²⁹ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 167.

they had received in school as children and a desire to ensure the children in their classrooms had the opportunity to receive a similar grounding in the Christian faith.

In order to engage with this type of student, initiating conversations about faith and teaching in ways that resonate with their desire to be actors in the sphere of social justice or that stimulate their interest in the spiritual dimension of life will be important. It is not about converting them but allowing them to explore the contribution Christianity can make to the spiritual development of young people in schools, in the hope that they may take a closer look at the truth claims of Christianity for themselves.

Religiously Indifferent

Religiously Indifferent emerging adults neither care to practice religion nor oppose it. They are simply not invested in religion either way; it really doesn't count for that much.³⁰

In Northern Ireland, it is still relatively unusual for a young adult to grow up without some awareness of the Christian faith and in many cases, it still occupies some part of their cultural or community identity, even for those Smith would classify as the religiously indifferent. This means in many cases young adults are familiar with Christianity even if they do not consider themselves to be religious or have a personal faith. When it comes to religious education in schools, they generally accept it as part of the cultural and social norms within our society and have no particular reason to oppose it. To do so, could be viewed by some as a betrayal of their own social and cultural identity.

The religiously indifferent are unlikely to turn up at church or the Christian Union any time soon. Therefore, the training they receive in relation to teaching RE Curriculum, may be the only opportunity they have as emerging adults to explore the Christian faith. This will be all the

³⁰ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 167.

more effective if the training can take place within a community of learners, providing opportunities to interact with Christians seeking to live out their faith with integrity and authenticity.

Religiously Disconnected

Religiously Disconnected emerging adults have little to no exposure or connection to religious people, ideas, or organizations. They are neither interested nor opposed to religion...Faith simply has not been part of their lives in any significant way, and it does not seem that it will become so in the near future, if ever.³¹

This group of emerging adults are highly unlikely to engage in any activities or programs in their everyday lives that provides them with an opportunity to explore the Christian faith. Faith is something for other people but for them is irrelevant. Smith includes a comment from one young lady in this group that makes clear that she does not wish to be associated with 'Christian-y, (or) church-going types.'³² This young lady and many like her are highly unlikely to plug into a church or Christian activity whilst at college.

The majority of religiously disconnected students in our colleges and universities, are unlikely to have the opportunity to explore the Christian faith for themselves, as religion is simply not on their radar. However, because of the requirements surrounding the delivery of religious education in schools, the two teacher training colleges have a unique opportunity to provide religiously indifferent young adults with an opportunity to learn more about the Christian faith during their time at university. The challenge for Christian faculty is to understand the different types of emerging adults sitting in their lecture or seminar room and find ways to bridge the gap between their views of religion and the glorious life-giving truth of the Gospel. This must not simply be an exercise in intellectual persuasion but rather through the pursuit of

³¹ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 168.

³² Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 23.

authentic relationships in which the connections between faith and practice are clear. We must be prepared to walk the walk if we are to show the *religiously indifferent* the ways in which Christ and his followers can make a real difference in this world and in the lives of those we teach.

Irreligious

Irreligious emerging adults hold sceptical attitudes about and make critical arguments against religion generally, rejecting the idea of personal faith. They may conclude that religion is functionally good for some people, but their general attitude is incredulous, derogatory, and antagonistic...Emerging adults who identify as atheists or agnostics generally fall into this type.³³

This group maybe the hardest to reach for churches or campus ministries. These young adults can be aggressively dismissive of any faith agenda and may have openly rejected the faith of their parents or the community in which they grew up. Then suddenly they find themselves faced with a dilemma as they train to become teachers in Northern Ireland, a system in which almost 50% of the employment opportunities require them to hold a Certificate in Religious Education.

Here perhaps Kinnaman's category of *Prodigals* is particularly helpful, especially if we view them in light of the parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-32. The elder son in the story traded in his birth right and left his family and community behind in search of wealth and freedom. The motives Jesus is shedding light on in this parable are surely present in the lives of many young adults who can be categorized as irreligious. What is interesting in the story is the dawning realization of the younger son of his need and the security offered within his father's house,

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer

³³ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 168.

worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.” So, he got up and went to his father. (Luke 15:17-20)

Our prayer for the irreligious as they prepare to teach Religious Education should be that they might see the security and comfort that is available to them in belonging to Christ’s family and the willingness of the Father to embrace them, even whilst they are far away. Our hope has to be that as they are drawn into the stories of faith and begin to see the Christian faith as something which stretches beyond the traditional walls of church or a particular faith community but rather is an integral part of life.

This book is a follow up to Smith’s earlier work, *Soul Searching* in which he concluded that the two major factors affecting the degree to which emerging generation Americans retained a faith commitment beyond their teenage years were the influence of parents and the influence of other significant adults in the lives of the young people. *Souls in Transition* confirms those conclusions for emerging adults as well:

Furthermore, it is not only parents who matter in forming the religion of emerging adults. Other non-parental adults in the lives of youth are often also important and, in certain circumstances, can actually substitute for parents as formative influences in the lives of youth.³⁴

The challenge for Stranmillis is to recognize the different types of emerging adults identified by Smith and use this knowledge to shape the training available to students. The hope is that this can be more than a purely academic exercise and allow students to develop a deeper understanding of Christianity on a personal level too. This affords the significant number of Christian faculty at the college with an opportunity to play a significant role in the faith formation of the young adults on the college campus. The challenge for us is how to live out our faith in such ways that young adults are drawn towards Jesus.

³⁴ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 285.

Faith and Work including Vocation

Every Good Endeavour

In this work Keller delivers a clear biblical and theological vision for work and articulates the good news for all of us is that our work matters to God. Work has significance in this world now and also to the coming of the Kingdom. Crucially in relation to this thesis-project the book provides a detailed review of how work and faith are intertwined, providing valuable insights that can help guide Christian students on their journey towards integrating their faith and work.

The book contains three clear sections which explore God's plan for work; our problems with work; and the Gospel and work. Each conversation about work within the text is set within the grand biblical narrative, articulating a clear theology of work that reflects a clear Christian worldview.

God's Plan for Work

Keller begins in Genesis, pointing out that 'the Bible begins talking about work as soon as it begins talking about anything'. In reviewing the early chapters of Genesis we see how fundamental work is to our existence and something in which there is deep and satisfying joy. The Hebrew word *mlkh*—the word for ordinary human work—is used repeatedly to describe the work God does in creating the world. The author emphasises work as an intricate part of God's good plan for human beings and make the case that without meaningful work, human beings develop a profound sense of loss.

Work of all kinds brings dignity to human life because it reflects the character of God, in whose image we are made. All work should be seen as from God and for God, therefore we can view teaching as a sacred activity in which we can find meaning and purpose.

In order to find meaning and purpose in life through our work, Keller directs us towards biblical ideas concerning work – one is cultivation and the second is service. Viewing work as cultivation is a great metaphor for teaching, seeing the potential for growth in the lives of each pupil and helping to create an environment in which they can reach their full potential. Keller points out that ‘our word for culture comes from the idea of cultivation.’³⁵ The challenge and the opportunity for Christian teachers is to create in their classroom and schools a culture that promotes human flourishing.

The second perspective offered places an emphasis on viewing work as service and moves the reader from the book of Genesis to the New Testament, highlighting the idea that God brings purpose to our work by calling us to serve the world. “Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them” (1 Corinthians 7:17). In exploring the idea of ‘calling’ Keller points towards the Greek word *kaleo*, which means ‘to call’. Stressing that we are first called into relationship with God through Christ (Romans 8:30; 1 Corinthians 1:9) and secondly, we are called to participate in God’s mission as part of the church – *ekklesia* literally meaning the ‘ones called out’. For emerging adults who have accepted the call of Christ, the challenge is to help them live out their calling in this world through acts of service. In whatever setting they find themselves, student teachers need to be encouraged to view their work in the classroom as an outworking of their Christian faith.

The idea of calling is very counter cultural in postmodern society. Growing up within a globalized world economy that is dominated by individualism and consumerism, means most emerging adults have bought into the culture that work is about self-fulfilment and financial

³⁵ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavour: Connecting your work to God's work* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2012).

reward. One might think that Christian young people would be able to resist the prevailing culture, sadly this is not the case, perhaps because as Kinnaman states, “Despite years of church-based experiences and countless hours of Bible-centered teaching, millions of next-generation Christians have no idea that their faith connects to their life’s work.”³⁶ If young adults have received no teaching concerning how their faith connects with their work, then they have no alternative to viewing work other than through a postmodern, self-centred and financially motivated lens.

Keller cites Robert Bellah’s call to “recover the idea that work is a vocation or calling, a contribution to the good of all and not merely...a means to one’s own self-fulfilment and power.”³⁷ For Christian students currently training to be teachers, the Biblical language of vocation and calling has been drowned out by louder cultural voices. Christian students need to be given a bigger perspective of work, one which helps them to understand their work as part of God’s grand design for this world and helps them to recognise the gifts that God has given them to use in His service. In the case of student teachers, they have a slight head start on some other professions in that few people enter education in pursuit of high financial reward or purely to serve their own self-interest. From years of experience sitting on numerous selection panels for aspiring teachers and community educators, I know that for the majority of young adults they have some sense of wanting to make a difference in the lives of young people. This is a wonderful starting point from which to help them develop a biblical understanding of vocation and a fuller appreciation of what it means to be called by God.

³⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 207.

³⁷ Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Stephen Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (San Francisco, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 287-288.

Before moving on to consider the two remaining sections of the book, it's worth to highlighting a connection between a noteworthy observation made by Keller concerning Luther's view of our calling and vocation and what I observe as a worrying trend amongst emerging generation Christians in Northern Ireland. As we celebrate 500 years of the Reformation in 2017, I fear many committed Protestant young people are in danger of slipping back into the pre-reformation pattern of believing there is a 'spiritual estate'. I hear around table in Stranmillis, I have encountered it in Bible Study discussion groups and experienced it first hand when I stepped out of a ministry position into a secular job last year. Many young adults I have spoken to who are training to be teachers or who are in the early stages of their teaching career, seem to believe they would have many more opportunities to do God's work if they were in youth ministry rather than the classroom. Somewhere behind these comments lies the belief that they are only engaged in God's work if they are preparing Bible talks, organising mission trips, taking young people on a spiritual retreat or talking about Jesus. Those who hold this view often talk about wanting to put their time to better use, rather than wasting it on things like, lesson plans, marking and dealing with behavioural issues in the classroom. The danger with this view is that it elevates church work or mission above all other types of work, exactly what Luther condemn in his treatise *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*,³⁸ calling it pure fiction and reminding Christians that we are all part of 'a royal priesthood and a priestly realm' (1 Peter 2:9). Any discussion of vocation needs to reject this separation of sacred and secular work on biblical grounds and challenge the view that you have more missional opportunities if you are engaged in full time Christian ministry, than if you are in the classroom. Having spent over 15 years in full time youth ministry and five years teaching in a high school,

³⁸ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Fortress, 1970), 12.

the evidence points to having many more opportunities to engage in the *mission dei* in the school classroom, than I ever had working for the church. That is not to deny a calling into youth ministry that God may place on someone's life but rather to challenge the theological assumptions that elevate full time Christian work above all other forms of work. Keller, rightly points us to towards the words of Luther and reminds us that each of us is inherently valuable to God, therefore he sees the work we do as inherently valuable. It matters not that we are a teacher, youth pastor, farmer or actor, what matters is that He "gives all work a common and exalted purpose: to honour God by loving your neighbours and serving them through your work."³⁹

Our Problems with Work

In part two of the book the authors describe the frustrations and emptiness that many of us associate with work in our broken, fractured world. Keller describe how it can feel fruitless, pointless, selfish, and even idolatrous. The starting point for the discussion is in Genesis, Chapter 3, and the impact that the Fall has had on every aspect of human life, including work. The author reminds us that 'all work and human effort will be marked by frustration and a lack of fulfilment.'⁴⁰ Work itself is not a curse but the impact of sin in this world means that we will encounter difficulty and strife in our working lives.

Keller introduces the powerful metaphor of 'living in the palace' in this section of the book, encouraging us to see our workplaces as places of privilege and an opportunity to invest our social capital in the well-being of others. This is powerfully illustrated within the story of Esther which offers a powerful antidote to the prevailing western culture. It also reflects the command given by God to his people, when they are carried off into exile by Nebuchadnezzar,

³⁹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 75.

⁴⁰ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 90.

Thus, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29: 4-7)

This reminder from Jeremiah, and the way in which Keller unpacks the story of Esther offer a vision of work which moves us away from viewing work from an individualistic perspective, to seeing the potential we have to use our personal influence and skills to sow seeds that will help shift individuals and society closer to God.

Growing this perspective in student teachers is important for two reasons. Firstly, it is a reminder to view their work in schools ultimately as service to God, filled with opportunities to love their neighbours by serving the children they teach each day in ways that help them to grow and flourish both now and in the future. This work carries with it eternal significance. Secondly, viewing teaching as an opportunity to bless others, rather than as an opportunity for personal reward, can I believe help to build emotional and spiritual resilience in teachers. As Keller points out student teachers ‘should expect to be regularly frustrated in your work even though you may be in exactly the right vocation.’⁴¹ However, by understanding the big picture of God’s story and His redemptive purposes for this world students can be encouraged to look for glimpses of grace in each day, even in the toughest of working environments. Keller says consolation will be found in knowing that although ‘thorns and thistles’ will invade the soil in which we are planting, that ultimately all things will be restored when Christ comes again. This leads nicely into the final part of the book in which the authors explore the Gospel and Work.

⁴¹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 94.

The Gospel and Work

Moving towards the conclusion of his study on work, Keller explores the importance of the Christian worldview in helping people to place their work within the context of the Gospel and make sense of it all. He summarises it as follows:

Creation (Plan): The whole world is good.

Fall (Problem): The whole world is fallen.

Restoration (Solution): The whole world is going to be redeemed.⁴²

Worldviews shape us. If people are to view their work as God intends, then they need to view it through the lens of a Christian worldview, to see their patterns of behaviour, habits and ideas in light of the Gospel. Helping student teachers enter the classroom grounded in God's story, aware of His grace in their own lives and with a redemptive vision for the work they undertake in their classroom is vital if we are to equip the next generation of Christian teachers for Kingdom service. For those who will be involved in delivering religious education and teaching others about God, Jesus, the Bible, the Church and Christian morality, we must ensure they place all of that teaching within the framework of a Christian worldview, lest they make the same mistake as so many churches and Sunday Schools in reducing the Bible to a series of stories about interesting people doing interesting things.

The pattern of the book mirrors the pattern of scripture, ultimately it is Christ who brings restoration as grace flows from the Gospel into every area of life, including our work, making it beautiful again. Knowing the Biblical story helps people to locate their own story and move towards a more integrated life, allowing them to discover what Buechner summarises so

⁴² Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 162-163.

beautifully in this way, 'The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.'⁴³ This is in essence what Keller is asserting in his plea to think about our working lives within the context of the Christian worldview. It is a vision of vocation which can guide and direct the careers of emerging generation student teachers.

Let Your Life Speak

In this autobiographical account, Parker Palmer draws on his own experiences and previously published work in which he explores the challenge of listening to your own inner life in order to live authentically as the person God made you to be.

Identity and Vocation

Palmer believes that an individual's deepest calling has to grow out of their own sense of authentic identity. Drawing on his Quaker heritage and Douglas Steere, he states that when we ask the question *Who am I?* it leads inevitably to the equally important question *Whose am I?* There can be no more important questions for emerging adults to resolve as transition towards mature adulthood,⁴⁴ than to know who they are and to know deep in their soul that they belong to God. They need to be supported in this process of self-discovery in order to be clear that "identity does not depend on the role we play or the power it gives us over others. It depends only on the simple fact that we are children of God, valued in and for ourselves."⁴⁵ Reflecting on his own life and what he sees in others, Parker is concerned that people spend more time listening to external voices, absorbing the expectations of others and struggling to

⁴³ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973).

⁴⁴ Erick Erickson in Jeffrey Arnett *Human Development a Cultural Approach* (London: Pearson, 2016).

⁴⁵ Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 87.

hear their own inner voice, that tells them the truth of the person that God has made them to be.

The result may be what Erikson described in his model of human development as Identity vs Role Confusion - Fidelity. However, Jeffrey Arnett's research many decades later suggest that most 18 year olds have yet to acquire the kind of fidelity that Erikson is talking about. Instead Arnett characterises emerging adulthood (18-29 years) as The Age of: Identity explorations; Instability; Self-focus; Feeling in-between; and Possibilities.⁴⁶ A time in their lives when they are still searching and learning to listen to their inner voice.

Parker's work on vocation offers up several fresh perspectives which are instructive for emerging generation student teachers. When it comes to identity and values. He states, "There may be moments in life when we are so unformed that we need to use values like an exoskeleton to keep us from collapsing. But something is very wrong if such moments recur often in adulthood."⁴⁷ His observation is a call to help emerging adults continue their journey towards understanding who it is God has made them to be. He warns against the danger of imitating others and attempting to live up to other people's expectations, concluding that life will always feel like a struggle when 'we are wearing other people's faces.'⁴⁸ If emerging adults are to find their calling then they must first do the hard work of self-discovery. Parker notes:

We do not find our callings by conforming ourselves to some abstract moral code. We find our callings by claiming authentic selfhood, by being who we are...the deepest vocational question is not "what ought I to do with my life?" It is the more elemental and demanding "Who am I? What is my nature?"⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Arnett, "Learning to Stand Alone: The Contemporary American Transition to Adulthood in Cultural and Historical Context," *Human Development* 41, no.5 (December 1998): 301.

⁴⁷ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 76.

⁴⁸ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 78.

⁴⁹ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 78.

Tim Suttle concludes that what they are looking for is their native way of being in the world, using the gifts God has granted them in his service.⁵⁰

Listening to the Voice of Vocation

Turning to the word vocation itself, Parker notes the Latin root of the word for 'voice' within it. Having found their true identity, he encourages people to listen to the inner voice of their true identity when trying to gain an understanding of their own vocation. This requires the ability to move beyond the surface of everyday life and acknowledge that there is a deeper 'truer life waiting to be acknowledged.'⁵¹

Practicing the art of listening in the unending noise of a 24-7 media saturated world, is difficult. If students are to be supported in identifying their vocation, they will need opportunities to spend time in quiet reflection, cultivating an ability to listen for the quiet whisper of God within their own soul. In this sense, vocation is a gift waiting to be discovered. It is hoped this thesis-project might afford them such an opportunity.

Parker analyses vocation within the context of birth right and notes the problem with gifts given to each person by God, is that people spend the first half of their lives abandoning them or letting others deprive them of their gifts. The pressures on young people growing up in most western societies are overwhelming. Driven by all sorts of social pressures, emerging generations in search of acceptance can so easily lose their own true identity as a child of God. Parker retells a Hasidic tale which reveals with amazing brevity both the universal tendency to want to be someone else and the ultimate importance of becoming one's self: Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, 'in the coming world, they will not ask me, why were you not

⁵⁰ Tim Suttle, "Book Review of Let Your Life Speak", May, 2008, *Patheos*, accessed July 6, 2017 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/paperbacktheology/2008/06/let-your-life-speak.html>, accessed 6 July 2017.

⁵¹ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 78.

Moses? They will ask me, why were you not Zusya?’ The challenge for Christian students is in freeing themselves from the cultural norms of postmodern society to claim their true identity. Palmer says we are able to find ‘our callings by claiming authentic selfhood, by being who we are, by dwelling in the world as Zusya rather than straining to be Moses.’ Parker concludes the deepest vocational question we can ask, is not what ought I to do with my life? it is the more elemental and demanding question who am I?⁵²

It would be easy to misread Palmer’s focus on self as naval gazing but this is far from his intention. True vocation he argues joins self and service, and in so doing individuals can find the joy that every human being seeks whilst also finding their path of authentic service in the world. This resonates with connection articulated by Keller in *Every Good Endeavour* between being called by God and the divine purpose that lies behind our service in this world. Keller articulates a clearer biblical vision of our primary calling than Palmer but both agree with Frederick Buechner, when he defines vocation as ‘the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.’⁵³

For Palmer that place is in the classroom as a teacher. In his most well-known work, *The Courage to Teach*, he unpacks the importance of self-knowledge in the life of a teacher claiming it to be essential because ‘We teach who we are’. When wanting to consider what makes a good teacher, Palmer argues this sense of self must come first. Teachers must understand the landscape of their own lives on an intellectual, emotional and spiritual level. Teaching requires intellectual knowledge, empathy for those who are being taught and a means of connecting the longing of human hearts to the bigger picture of life in this world. Mature Christian faith offers all of the above to those who follow Christ and it is vital that the church and God’s people

⁵² Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 78.

⁵³ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 119.

provide students with opportunities to engage at an intellectual, emotional and spiritual level with Christianity. If they are to develop a heart for teaching as an expression of Christian vocation, they need to reclaim their relationship with the teacher within. The one being Jesus, whom as Parker says, 'we knew when we were children but lost touch with as we grew into adulthood.'⁵⁴ This is the crossroads of young adulthood. The point at which we can help nomads, exiles and prodigals recovering their true identity as children of God, whilst discovering what it means to be a good teacher.

Visions of Vocation

In *Visions of Vocation*, Garber draws on educational language regarding the nature of knowledge, learning and pedagogy to discuss vocation. In particular he takes key ideas from some of Simone Weil writings and uses them to illuminate the conversation. As a trained teacher, Weil had a deep passion for learning, coupled with a deep compassion for those in need, so her works resonate strongly within a conversation about teaching and Christian vocation. The book is an invitation to come and see the ways in ordinary men and women, young and old, are seeking to integrate their faith and work so that through their vocation they can shape the culture around them. Fundamentally, Garber argues that vocation is integral, not incidental to the mission Dei that God's people are to care not only for their own flourishing, but for the flourishing of the world.⁵⁵

Come and See Pedagogy

This theme runs throughout the book, providing an epistemological and theological basis for vocational praxis. Speaking to college students at a Veritas Forum, Garber asked his audience a question, *will you be able to know the world in all its brokenness, and still choose to*

⁵⁴ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 128.

⁵⁵ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 6-7.

love it? To his readers he poses a similar question, ‘how do we see what is awful and still engage, still enter in?’ The current narrative which surrounds teaching in Northern Ireland is often negative, focusing on the problems pupils bring with them into the classroom and the lack of resources. This often leaves students feeling fearful of the challenges that lie ahead. Garber writes, ‘All day, every day, there are both wounds and wonders at the very heart of life if we have eyes to see.’⁵⁶ Garber is a realist with a hopeful message and his book may help reframe the conversation about a career in teaching for student teachers. He concludes that there is nothing that requires more of us than to know and love at the same time. Teaching is a vocation which presents unlimited opportunities to know and love life at the same time, in the very best and very worst of moments. The challenge is to help Christian students see the ways in which they can live out the love of Christ in school.

Garber eloquently articulates his ‘Come and See’ pedagogy, through which he calls Christians to follow the example of Christ. Jesus lived his life amongst people, meeting them at their greatest point of need, in all the messiness of their lives. Jesus didn’t hide from what was difficult and painful in this world, he entered into its sorrow and wept. Come and See pedagogy is according to Garber about learning to pay attention, developing the ability to discern what matters most and to follow through, to live incarnational lives. The story of the Good Samaritan is highlighted as an example of what it means to pay attention, to see the world as it really is and be willing to step in and make a difference. Weil connected this idea to what she called sacramental learning- learning that is born out of the love of God and seeks to show that love to others, firstly to know God and secondly to see what really matters. Garber believes seeing is the place that vocations begin,

There is good work to be done by every son of Adam and every daughter of Eve, all over the face of the earth. There are flowers to be grown, songs to be sung, bread to be

⁵⁶ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 6.

baked, justice to be done, mercy to be shown, beauty to be created, good stories to be told, houses to be built, children to educate.⁵⁷

Common Grace for the Common Good

At the heart of Garber's come and see pedagogy is covenantal relationship with God which he notes carries vocational responsibilities. When humans respond to the call of God, they learn who God is and who they are, the challenge is then in knowing how you are going to respond?⁵⁸ According to Garber knowing and doing are at the core of every examined life. If believers are to fulfil the call of God on their lives they must reject the pedagogy of silence, in other words they must guard against seeing and not caring. Mark Schwehn argues that 'Epistemologies have ethical implications...ways of knowing are not morally neutral but morally directive.'⁵⁹ In response to this Garber asserts that humans must not only know rightly but do rightly, quoting John Stott he notes, 'a mind without a heart is nothing.'⁶⁰ So even though the realities of the world might be hard to face, Christians must accept the responsibilities given to them and choose to step into the world carrying hope. The question then is to consider how might the new Certificate in Religious Education to be offered at Stranmillis, help to form both hearts and minds?

Garber is honest about the challenges and realistic about what is possible. But he firmly believes if ordinary men and women, young and old seek to integrate their faith and work, through their vocation they can shape the culture around them. By living incarnate lives, 'telling the story of the Word becoming flesh, and of words becoming flesh through our vocations,'⁶¹ Christian teachers have the opportunity to play their small part in bringing hope to a hurting

⁵⁷ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 16.

⁵⁸ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 73.

⁵⁹ Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and Academic Vocation in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 94.

⁶⁰ John Stott, *Issues facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 17.

⁶¹ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 206.

world. They won't be perfect, they can only make things proximately better but they should do their very best, offering their working lives as an expression of common grace for the common good. "Living with a full understanding of vocation means choosing to see the wounds of the world and responding with a heart of flesh rather than a heart of stone. It means choosing the better but not the easier."⁶²

The book contains many stories and examples of individuals, families and communities seeking to live out their vocations in a wide range of situations, countries and professional fields. Its biographical content is sure to inspire emerging generation students, keen to make a difference in the world. However, in contrast to Palmer it starts with God rather than self as the place from which to explore Christian vocation. Others may view Garber's definition of vocation as too vague or broad or lacking a systematic approach to what the Bible has to say about vocation. However, what he does succeed in doing is putting flesh on the bones, showing how God's people can and are living out of common grace for the common good. *Visions of Vocation* is an invitation into and example of Garber's 'Come and See' pedagogy which sheds fresh light on the challenging subject of vocation.

Christian Teaching

Teaching and Christian Practices

In a series of essays and reflections from focused on research generated through the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith, editors David and James Smith, provide a roadmap for Christian faculty and students seeking to understand the relationship of faith and learning. Offering insights that can inform the training of student

⁶² Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 96.

teachers and their practice on entering the classroom, the book sets out a fresh vision for ‘the integration of faith and learning’.

David Smith, offers a critique of Christian education in which he contends that the central tasking of teaching has almost completely dropped off the scholarly radar. He acknowledges the significant growth in Christian scholarship and the increasing focus on the personal character or inner self of the teacher but laments the lack of substantial work in the area of pedagogical practices.⁶³ By providing concrete examples of how Christians can integrate faith and learning in the classroom, the contributors put hands and feet to Palmer’s call for teachers to pay attention to their inner voice.

Building on his earlier work *Desiring the Kingdom*, James Smith argues that Christian education is not just about the transfer of information but also about the task of formation through practices that shape us—practices that allow us to fully desire the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Adopting this type of integrated approach to faith and learning offers two key benefits for emerging generation student teachers. Firstly, it affords Kinnaman’s *Nomads, Exiles and Prodigals* with the opportunity to explore Christianity in a way that connects their head, heart and hands. Secondly, by modelling an integrated approach to faith and learning, the hope is that students can carry the ideas and examples from the college classroom out into the school classroom helping them to be more effective Christian educators.

Christian Pedagogy

David Smith argues that amidst the emergence of the new integration paradigm of faith and learning, developing distinctively Christian pedagogies has been largely ignored. Acknowledging the work of both Mark Noll,⁶⁴ who called for a robust vision of explicitly Christian

⁶³ Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*, 83.

⁶⁴ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 99.

scholarship echoing the work Abraham Kuyper and George Marsden,⁶⁵ David Smith calls for an explicit discussion of the relationship of religious faith to learning. The problem according to Smith is that the tendency has been to focus on epistemological concerns and the importance of developing a Christian worldview, which he argues is often unrelated to the student experience of learning.

At the heart of Smith's vision for developing a distinctively Christian pedagogy with an explicit focus on learning is,

The relationship between historic Christian practices and practices that characterize courses and classrooms...articulating more fully what might be Christian about pedagogy in ways that push beyond the spirituality of the individual teacher...or the ideas communicated...We suggest that Christian practices offers a kind of pedagogical wisdom that could reshape and redirect our classroom strategies in surprising yet fruitful ways.⁶⁶

Smith and Smith choose to use Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra's definition of Christian practices as, 'things Christian people do over time in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world.'⁶⁷ The examples are chosen from historic Christian practices such as hospitality, fellowship, testimony, sharing a meal, time-keeping, and adhering to a liturgical calendar. By incorporating these practices into the classroom, they argue a Christian teacher can reshape the learning environment in ways that help them to communicate the Gospel and lead to greater human flourishing.

Carolyn Call offers an example by asking the question 'What then would hospitality look like in a classroom?' She modelled hospitality by preparing food for her students each week, creating space in each class to listen to the hopes and fears of each student and allowing them to shape the conversations in class. She sums up classroom hospitality by saying it is about

⁶⁵ George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

⁶⁶ David Smith and James K. Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 25.

⁶⁷ David Smith and James K. Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, 125.

“receiving each other, our struggles, our new-born ideas with openness and care...acknowledging that each person is a child of God who should be honoured and cared for.”

Call recognises that this type of approach requires a sustained commitment on the behalf of the teacher if they are to succeed in creating a more open supportive space for all students and consistently demonstrate the love of Christ to all students, even the most challenging ones.

Having adopted this approach for a semester, Call notes that there was an increased sense of shared community within the class, with students prepared to be more open and welcoming to each other. She also notes that in adopting this approach she paid more attention to the intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of her students, resulting in a significant amount of personal growth and increased fellowship. Samson Makhado from South Africa cited in John Shortt’s *Bible Shaped Teaching*, describes the teacher as a host who welcomes and provides hospitality for students as honoured guests:

The hospitality metaphor suggests that teachers should develop a situation where children are seen as gifted, honoured guests who have something to share with others. They move from controlling students to strategies that provide students with the space to develop their gifts and pursue their calling...Students will seldom believe they have anything to bring unless there is someone who will show their willingness to receive them. Indeed, we discover our gifts in the eyes of the receiver. Teachers who can detach themselves from their need to impress and control and who can allow themselves to become recipients will find that it is when the gift is received it becomes more conspicuous.⁶⁸

This resonates with Christian Smith’s research on the mechanisms which help encourage religious commitment amongst young adults, “socialization through both formal teaching and informal modelling, the maintenance of relationships, the reinforcement of beliefs about what is good and true, habituation, the maintenance of a sense of identity, and a strong commitment to

⁶⁸ Samson Makhado and Dean Spalding, “Community and Hospitality in Multicultural Classrooms” in *Bible Shaped Teaching*, by John Shortt Bible Shaped Teaching (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 136-137.

a belief system.”⁶⁹ Kenda Creasy Dean’s unpacks this further in her book *Almost Christian*, in which she describes the importance of Christian practices in ‘Cultivating Consequential Faith’ amongst teens and young adults, identifying three categories of practices:

1. Translation – a working model of catechesis, in which living faith is passed on within a community of practice.
In this sense, we can see that both the church and the classroom offer spaces in which this can happen.
2. Testimony – a willingness to openly express Christian identity.
When Christian educators are open about telling their own stories of faith, they are pointing others towards God’s grace and mercy.
3. Detachment – can be experienced through de-cantering practices such as outreach, prayer and hospitality.
Opening up opportunities to engage learners with the empathy of Christ.

Considering the work of Christian Smith and Kenda Creasy Dean, James Smith suggests that the goal behind the application of spiritual practices to teaching is “the reinforcement of interrelated cognitive, emotional and spiritual qualities in young adults as a means to personal and communal formation to the fullest – in other words, the reordering of student’s loves so that they truly desire God’s kingdom.”⁷⁰

The material in *Teaching and Christian Practices*, provides a strong rationale for providing a formational program, which can help emerging adults become more effective teachers of religious education on entering the classroom. It also highlights the benefits of such a program for the students themselves. In the first instance, it will help to form the teacher spiritually. Secondly, it will challenge default teaching styles and approaches, offering fresh ways

⁶⁹ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

⁷⁰ David Smith and James Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, 30.

to integrate Christian practices into teaching about Christianity. Thirdly, it will help students 'live into' Christian practices and growing spiritually, as well as intellectually.

Bible Shaped Teaching

John Shortt has spent a lifetime thinking about the integration of faith and learning, with a particular focus on the school classroom and the task of the teacher. He is clear that understanding the Christian metanarrative of God's story found in the Bible is essential if Christians are to help the next generation to grow and flourish. Neil Postman's book *The End of Education*, highlights that the stories in which most people are living are dominated by advertising, consumerism and technology. Shortt laments that these are "the stories told to us and, over and over again, to our impressionable young children, rather than the wonderful truth of God's story in the Bible."⁷¹ He suggests teaching the Bible well means more than simply telling the stories, it means 'living in it because it is true, it is how things really are in time and history.'⁷²

The Bible as an Ecosystem

Shortt reviews a number of metaphors used to describe or explain what the Bible is like, but the one he chooses to use in the context of the Bible and teaching is that of ecosystem. Shortt sees the Bible as an environment that we should seek to inhabit, a place in which to live, breathe and find our meaning. Again, the centrality of the teacher's own life comes to the fore and Shortt seeks to make connections between the way in which the Bible shapes people and how that will impact how teachers undertake their work in classroom.

⁷¹ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 20

⁷² Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 21.

Shortt suggests the first way in which the Bible shapes people and their classroom teaching is in relation to the story it tells. He says that 'stories are central to the way in which we structure our understanding of ourselves and others, and of actions and events.'⁷³ Our stories overlap and are connected within God's big story. Teaching is at heart a relational activity, as Palmer notes 'All real living is meeting and teaching is endless meeting.'⁷⁴ When teachers and pupils together can locate themselves within the grand narrative of Scripture, things begin to make more sense.

Biblical Teaching Models

Whilst there are no examples of schools as we understand them in the 21st century, the Bible includes many examples of teachers and learners. Shortt reminds us that Jesus is referred to as Rabbi or teacher more than fifty times in the Gospels.⁷⁵ He is also referred to as a learner who during his childhood is described as growing in wisdom (Luke 2:52), as an adult we are told that he 'learned obedience' (Hebrews 5:8).

Jesus the Teacher

Jesus as teacher is an idea which is familiar to many, Shortt's reflections offer aspiring student teachers five ways in which Christ offers them an example of how they should teach:

1. Rooted in Everyday Life

Jesus used the everyday situations and circumstances, the environment in which people were living to make connections with them and tell them stories. He helped them to understand God through everyday objects, tasks and situations that people found themselves and he lived His life amongst them, experiencing the same trials and temptations.

⁷³ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 13.

⁷⁴ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 14.

⁷⁵ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 37.

2. Appropriate

In reading the Gospel accounts you get a strong sense that Jesus always 'began with where people were, with the issues that concerned them and the questions they asked.'⁷⁶ There were things he wanted to tell them, truth about God that he wanted to share but by connecting with people first on a human level, He was able to deliver His message with grace and compassion.

3. Provoked Thought

Jesus asked a lot of good questions. He helped encourage people to think for themselves and always giving them the opportunity to choose for themselves the way that they would go. It is really important that young people are given the chance to think for themselves in the classroom. Teachers usually feel it is their responsibility to ensure that their pupils know the right answers due to performance driven education systems in which the position a school sits on government league tables can end up mattering more than people. Jesus the teacher models a different approach.

In relation to religious education and faith development in the young, James Fowler's Model of Faith Development is useful in underlying the importance of people having the opportunity to ask questions in order that they can come to 'own' faith for themselves. In Christian Smith's research, emerging adults expressed concern that their questions were often ignored or dismissed causing them to lose interest in Christianity and drift away from the faith. Good teaching should provoke people to think for themselves and wrestle with the big questions of life, in 'that way, the truth can work its roots down deep into the mind.'⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 27.

⁷⁷ Derek Kidner, "Jesus the Teacher," *Religious Studies Today* 10 (1984) 9-12 in *Bible Shaped Teaching*, John Shortt, 38.

4. Memorable

Jesus always sought to make His teaching memorable. He made excellent use of vivid imagery, humour, and storytelling to draw His listeners in and then surprise them with a new perspective or truth they had not considered before. Emerging adults may fail to see these dynamic, funny engaging stories leaping from the pages of their Bible because they have long since neglected as being relevant for their lives or perhaps certain stories have lost what made them memorable because of over telling in Sunday School. Christian teachers need to be reminded afresh of the mystery, wonder and joys contained in the Bible so that they might be re-captivated by the stories for themselves and able to share them in memorable ways in the classroom.

5. Motivated by Love

Jesus treated all people with compassion, loving them and seeking to reach them at their point of greatest need. Being motivated by the love of Christ has massive implications for the classroom practice of teachers, as it shifts the focus away from self towards meeting the needs of learners. The goal for the Christian teacher is not to simply get through the day having delivered all the activities they had planned the night before. The real goal is that they might step into school each day able to show the loving kindness of Jesus to all they meet.

Modes of Teaching

Drawing on the work of Walter Bruggemann in *The Creative Word*, Shortt highlights three modes of teaching from the Old Testament: Torah, Prophets and Writings. These reflections are particularly helpful when considering how to prepare Christian students to teach religious education.

Torah - *“Teaching in Torah mode is teaching that gives us identity, teaching that tells us who we are and where we are and provides security in all the unexpected events that happen to*

us.”⁷⁸ Shortt points to Deuteronomy, Chapter 6 as the foundational passage for this mode of teaching. The *shema* is a reminder given by God to His people lest they forget who He is and who they are. It seems clear that many young adults who are Christians, have forgotten the core truths found in this passage that they are to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’ (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5). If they can first understand this and believe it for themselves, then Christian may create an environment in which all children can feel safe and cared for.

Prophet - *“We rarely question the prevailing views in our culture or in our church subculture. We need prophetic teaching that shakes us up, that leads us to ask the big questions, to look at things in a new way.”*⁷⁹ Students preparing to become teachers need help to stand firm in their own faith, whilst being open enough to accept that their understanding of the Christian faith may need to extend beyond what they have learnt in their youth group. The idea of teachers being prophets has two contributions to make in an increasingly secular society. This generation of student teachers can help to maintain biblical values in Northern Ireland’s schools by putting their faith into action and being willing to speak prophetic truth into the lives of the children and young people they will teach. However, this can only happen if they have a good understanding of the Bible for themselves, some idea as to how to integrate faith into their practice and see their role in the classroom as fulfilling their God given calling.

Wisdom – *“This is not the spectator knowledge of the person watching the football game, not the theoretical knowledge that we can talk and talk about; it is the on-the-playing-field knowledge of what we are to do. Knowing how to do and say things and when to do and say them.”*⁸⁰ Being able to discern what God would have you say to each individual pupil you

⁷⁸ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 55.

⁷⁹ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 40.

⁸⁰ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 41.

come into contact with each day, is one of the most important spiritual gifts a teacher can possess.

Conclusion

Shortt offers the following advice to teachers:

If we only teach people what to believe, we make them secure but self-satisfied, or we turn them off and alienate them. If we only teach them to ask questions, then they never know what to believe – always questions and never answers, no security. If we only teach them practical life lessons, they never get to see the big picture of God's world and never explore beyond the limits of their present knowledge.⁸¹

In the postmodern world where so many are robbed of any secure foundation on which to build their lives, Christian teachers with a strong understanding of their own God given identity and calling can help to create a cultivate a different kind of classroom. One which is built on God's Word, filled with the love, compassion and grace of Christ, leading to an environment in which all can flourish.

⁸¹ Shortt, *Bible Shaped Teaching*, 42.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROJECT

Introduction

The first step in planning the project was to narrow the focus, identify the methodological paradigm and the research tools that would be used to explore the thesis. As a new faculty member at Stranmillis University College, I was committed to conducting my research with emerging generation students undertaking initial teacher education at the college.

Planning the Project

The first task for any researcher in planning and designing the research phase of a project, is to determine the methodological framework within which the thesis will be explored. There are several key issues that need to be addressed in the research design. Firstly, what epistemological position will the researcher adopt in seeking to conduct the study - positivist or interpretivist? Secondly, what type of data will be collected - quantitative or qualitative, or both? Thirdly, what methods will be used to collect the data - experiments, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews etc.? It is crucial that researchers make their decisions based upon the nature of their enquiry and the questions to which they are seeking answers, rather than deciding on the methods and then coming up with the questions.

Within the social sciences and educational research, an interpretivist approach to conducting research is often adopted. Interpretivism looks 'to understand how people see, think, and feel about the world, seeking to grasp diverse perspectives in their own terms.'¹ The reason for this is that social scientists and educational researchers are seeking to understand the ways in which the people they are studying are shaped by the particular cultures they live in and

¹ Gary Thomas, *How to Do your Research Project* (London: Sage, 2013), 22.

how that influences the ways in which they act and feel. Beliefs and attitudes toward the world vary in time and space, from individual to individual, and from one group or society to another. Increasingly people's attitudes and behaviors are being shaped by global trends and connections in ways that have not seen before. Researchers must be mindful of developments in new technologies and the ways in which information is shared across time and space when undertaking any form of social research.² This is perhaps especially true in the case of emerging generation students who are more interconnected than all the generations who have gone before and are more influenced by global trends and systems. According to a BBC World Service Poll in 2016, young adults increasingly see themselves as global rather than national citizens.³

Adopting an interpretivist approach in methodological terms, allows the researcher to pay attention to and better understand the distinctive cultural factors influencing the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of the group being studied. It requires an openness on behalf of the researcher and a willingness to set aside their own cultural assumptions and attitudes,⁴ in order to understand the participants involved in the study. Smith states, "Complete objectivity and neutrality are impossible to achieve because the values of researchers and participants are not divorced from the phenomenon or issues being studied."⁵ Being aware of was crucial, especially as the environment and group being studied were familiar to the researcher.

Using an interpretivist approach within educational research presents an opportunity to conduct action research, in which the researcher-researched relationship can become a partnership, or where the focus is placed on improving professional practice and/or the

² Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide: for small social science research projects* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2010), 4.

³ Globescan, *Global Citizenship Report 2017* (London: Globescan, 2017), 13.

⁴ Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, 56.

⁵ John Smith, "Quantitative versus Qualitative Research: An attempt to clarify the issue," *Educational Researcher*, 12 (3) (1985): 3-16.

personal development of an individual. This is because as Thomas argues educational research should be concerned with 'realizing educational ideals or achieving educational outcomes, rather than simply producing educationally-relevant knowledge.'⁶ At the planning stage of this thesis project two educational outcomes were clearly in view. Firstly, to enable student teachers grow in their understanding of how their Christian faith relates to their role in delivering Religious Education in schools. Secondly, in conversation with the Principal, it was agreed that the seminar series would act as a pilot project in relation to the development of the new Certificate in Religious Education to be offered at Stranmillis.

Interpretivist research usually involves collecting qualitative data in order to try and understand how people think, feel and act. The data can include text obtained through questionnaires, recordings of conversations or interviews and information collected through focus groups. For the purposes of this research it was decided that it would be helpful to obtain the majority of qualitative data through focus groups and questionnaires. Focus group were ideal for this study as they encourage open discussion and the development of relationships between participants, as group dynamics tend to generate richer qualitative data and offer a positive environment for the study participants. Stewart and Shamdasani have pointed out that large groups can be chaotic, hard to manage for the moderator and frustrating for participants who feel they get insufficient opportunities to speak.⁷

In addition to the qualitative data, it was deemed prudent to collect some quantitative data through the questionnaires so that some numeric data could be collected to support future policy development. This study therefore adopts what Clark and Creswell define as a mixed

⁶ Thomas, *How to Do Your Research Project*, 17.

⁷ David Stewart and Prem Shamdasani, *Focus Groups: Theory and practice* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

methods research, 'a design for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a study in order to understand a research problem.'⁸

Defining the Focus Group

It was important that all students, regardless of their religious background were invited to participate in the focus group. Recognizing the religious diversity that exists amongst our student body, the title of the seminar series '*Teaching and Christian Vocation*' was carefully chosen to ensure the language was inclusive of both Protestant and Catholic students. An email invitation was issued to all undergraduate students in the second, third or fourth year of their education degree at Stranmillis, inviting them to participate in the study. Students in their first year of study, do not undertake teaching practice until Spring Semester, so have had no professional teaching experience at this point in their studies and were therefore excluded from the study.

As the research focused on the relationship between student teachers' own faith and their role in delivering religious education, I contacted the President of the Christian Union at Stranmillis and arranged to deliver a short talk about my research at one of their weekly gatherings. This allowed me to connect directly with students in person and was very helpful in highlighting my research within the Christian student community in the college. It also had the added benefit of raising awareness amongst the students in attendance that I and the college leadership are seeking ways in which Stranmillis can support the spiritual, as well as professional formation of student teachers. This was warmly received by the students.

⁸ Vicki Clark and John Creswell, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (London: Sage Publishing, 2017), 78.

Meeting the Participants

I held a short meeting with each student who expressed interest via email or in person before beginning the data collection and holding the first focus group. This allowed me to discuss the research project with them in more detail, outline the informed consent process and gave students the opportunity to ask questions about the process before agreeing to participate. It was clear from chatting with each of the students that they all shared an active Christian faith and had a desire to explore how their relationship with Christ relates to their role in school.

In total fifteen students agreed to participate in the study and attend the seminars, this included 13 female students and 2 male students which is broadly reflective of the male female student ratio within the education programmes at Stranmillis. The group included six students in Year 2; five in Year 3; and four in Year 4.

Outline of the Course

At the start of the process, the title of the course, seminar outline and how it related to the thesis of the project was outlined. The relationship of the course title, *Teaching and Christian Vocation* to the thesis of the project was explained and the content which was to be covered each week was briefly described.

The starting point for the course was to review the legal status of Religious Education in Northern Ireland and the theological and biblical content of the NI Curriculum. The first seminar also considered the importance of a Christian worldview using David Arm's beautiful painting 'God's Story', as an epistemological and educational framework through which students can view their role as teachers.

The second session covered the importance of calling and vocation in the lives of Christians. In this seminar, a number of key biblical passages were explored along with the views of some significant Christian leaders and thinkers in relation to vocation.

The third session considered the role of the Bible in the task of teaching and the challenges of delivering biblically based religious education in a society and schools which are increasingly secular and multi-faith.

One of the themes which emerged very strongly in discussions with the students during the course, was anxiety that they could potentially get in trouble for being too open about their faith or expressing Christian beliefs in the classroom. The fourth session considered how Christian practices and values can help teachers to live out their calling to be salt and light in the classroom - even in contexts where they feel talking openly about their faith might lead to criticism or even disciplinary action. This seminar was more of a workshop than seminar in which the students engaged in discussion and spent time thinking about classroom activities that would afford them opportunities to model Christian values to their pupils. The series concluded by providing all the participants with some practical ideas which they can develop and seek to put into action as they undertake school-based work placements in the coming months.

Pre-seminar Questionnaire

A questionnaire was issued to all participants prior to the seminar series as I wanted to gain some basic quantitative and qualitative data from the participants regarding their personal beliefs, their role as teachers and their views concerning religious education in schools, prior to the project. The information from the survey gave me valuable insights into the background and

views of the students. It was also helpful in the planning and preparation of the seminar series. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2.

Questionnaire Results

In terms of the degree programme they are studying at Stranmillis University College, 13 out of 15 are on the B.Ed. Primary course. This means that upon graduation and entering the teaching profession in Northern Ireland they will be expected to deliver religious education within their classroom.

The majority of students, twelve out of fifteen attended a Controlled school in Northern Ireland, with two attending an Integrated School and one attending a private Methodist school in the Republic of Ireland. The group therefore had no personal experience of religious education within the context of a Maintained Catholic school.

Following collection of basic demographic data, students were then asked two questions which focused on how their personal faith informs or shapes their views on teaching and religious education:

Question 3. How important was faith in your decision to become a teacher?

Twelve students indicated that their faith was 'Quite Important' in the decision to become a teacher, with three indicating that their faith was 'Very Important' in the decision. I believe this is significant as it indicates some degree of integration between their personal faith and their choice of profession, which is perhaps significant in relation to their understanding of Christian vocation.

Question 4. Do you believe that a teacher's personal beliefs should be reflected in their teaching?

All fifteen participants answered 'Yes' to this question. This is strong evidence suggesting that this particular group of emerging generation students see their faith as being directly related to their work and the way in which they seek to go about the task of teaching. It is important to acknowledge that the responses to these questions are perhaps unsurprising given that these students had voluntarily chosen to participate in a research study called on *Teaching and Christian Vocation*. Given this and the relatively small sample size, one must be careful in assuming that these findings are representative of all Christian students undertaking degrees in Teacher Training at Stranmillis. However, the results were encouraging in preparing for the seminar series, as they provided a strong indication of the willingness of the participants to engage with the subject material.

The results to question five, question six, question seven and question 8 are included on the following two pages to highlight participant's views concerning the importance of Religious Education within schools and their role in the delivery of the subject. It is clear from the responses that the students believe RE to be a crucial or very important part of the NI Curriculum (Figure 1) and the majority also appear to be very familiar with the content of the RE Curriculum (Figure 3). However, only five out of fifteen indicated that they felt confident in teaching RE (Figure 2). This would seem to suggest held strong beliefs in relation to the inclusion of RE in the curriculum but lack confidence in relation to their role in the delivery of the subject. Given that the majority highlighted that they had only received a small amount of training which they considered relevant to their delivery of RE, more training is needed (Figure 4).

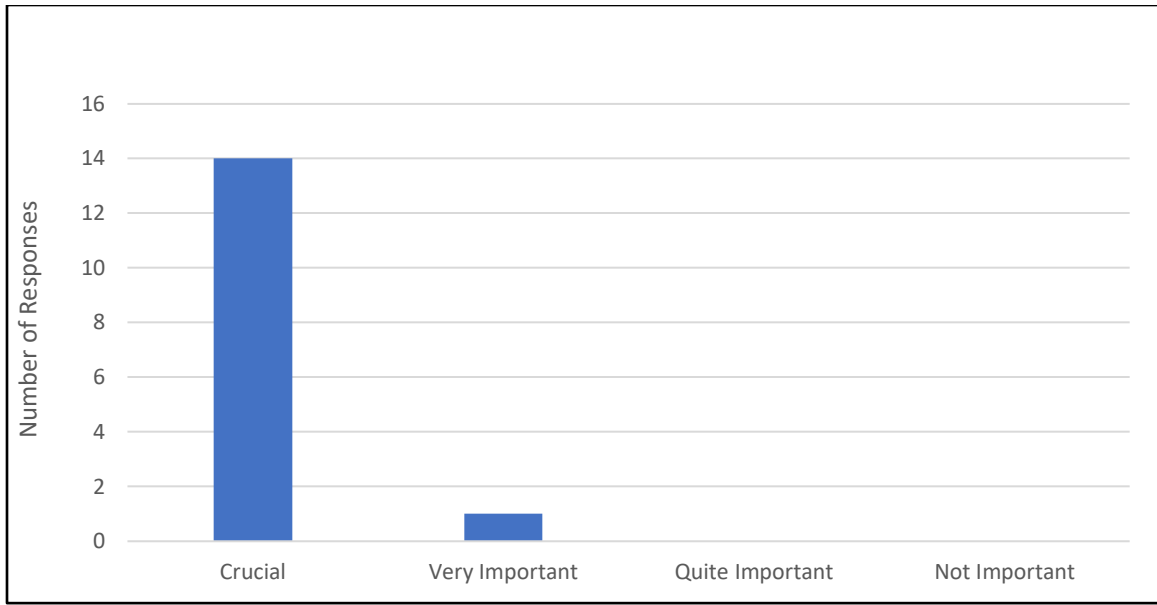


Figure 1. The Importance of Religious Education in Schools

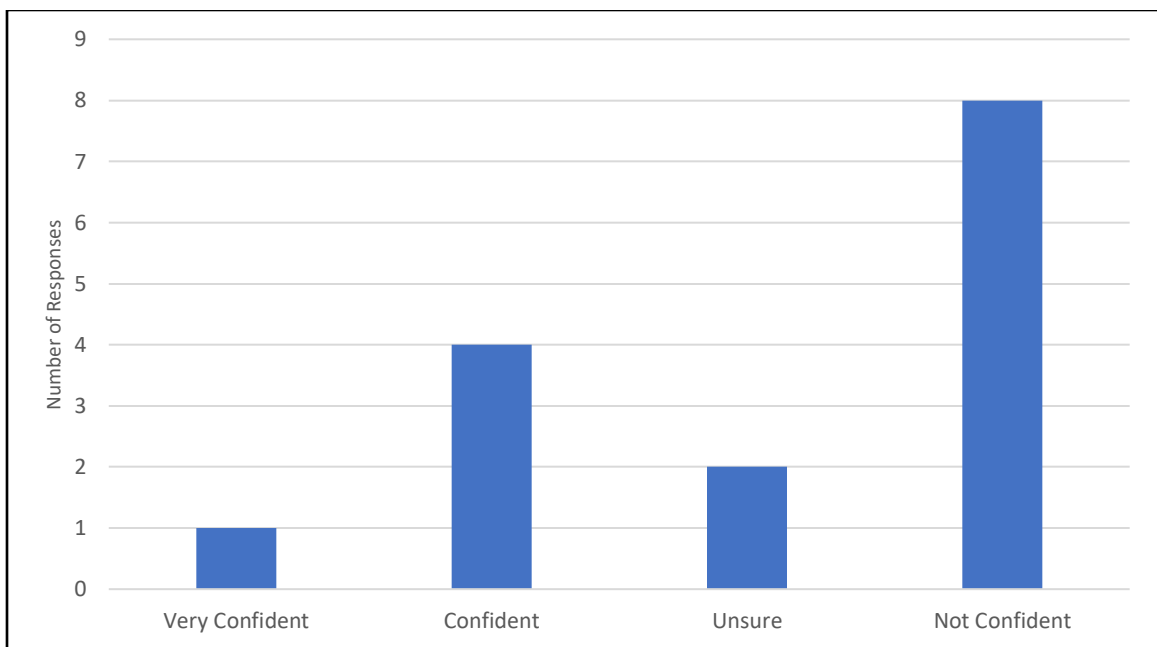


Figure 2. Confidence in Teaching RE

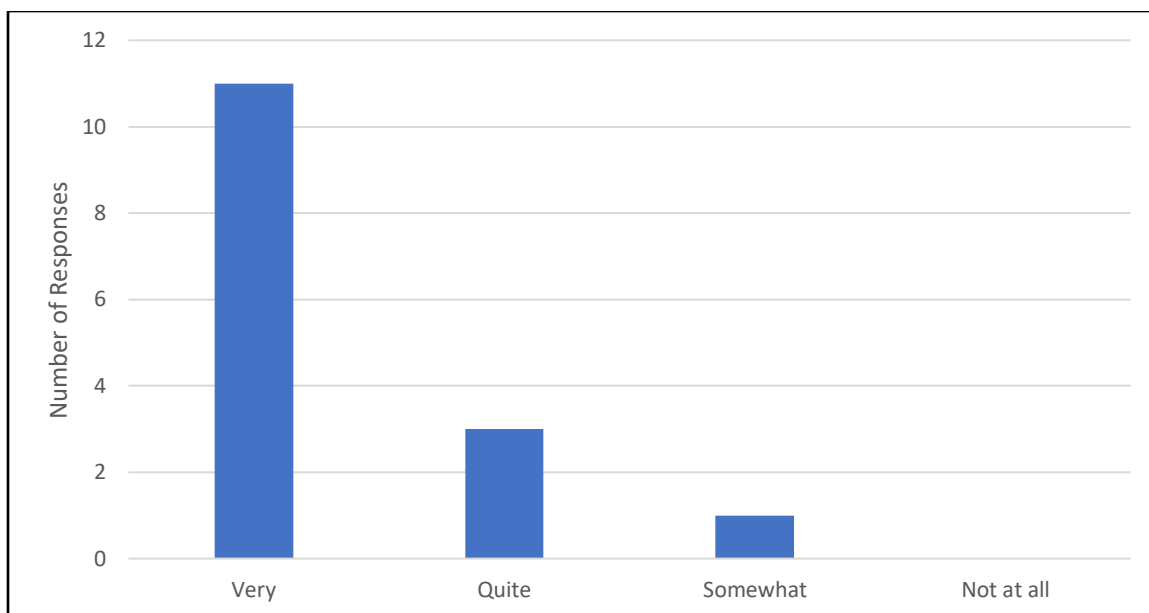


Figure 3. Familiarity with the RE Curriculum

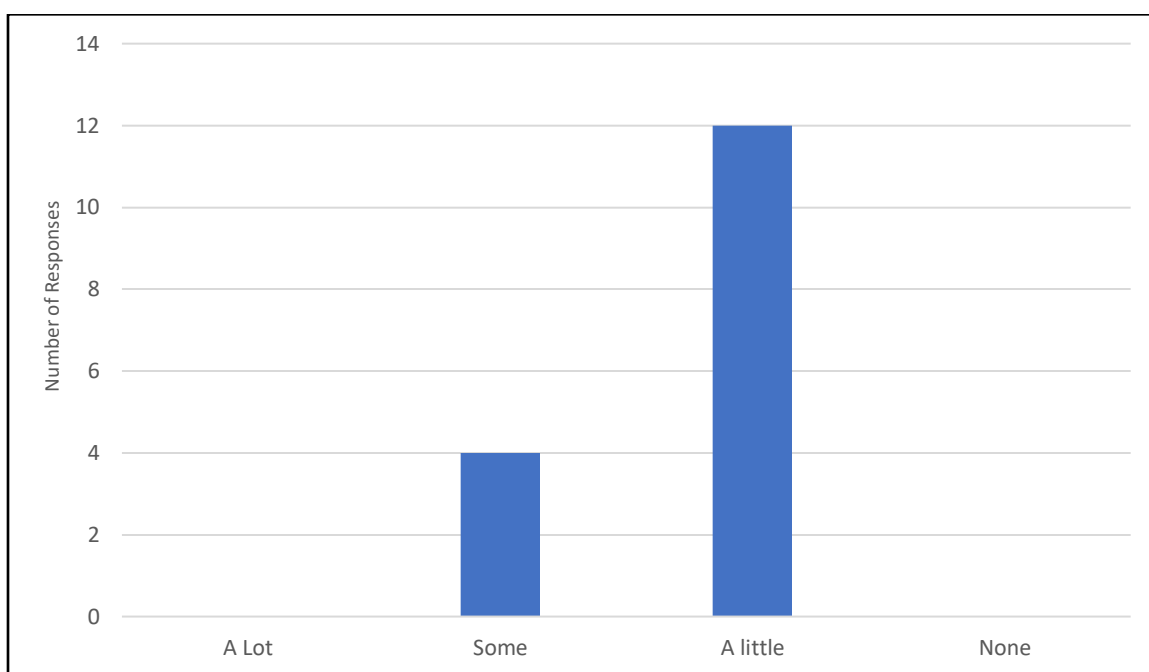


Figure 4. Training Relevant to the Delivery of RE

Question 9. Are you taking or would you consider taking the Certificate in Religious Education?

This question sought to determine the level of uptake or interest in the Certificate of Religious Education currently offered to all students undertaking Teacher Training at Stranmillis.

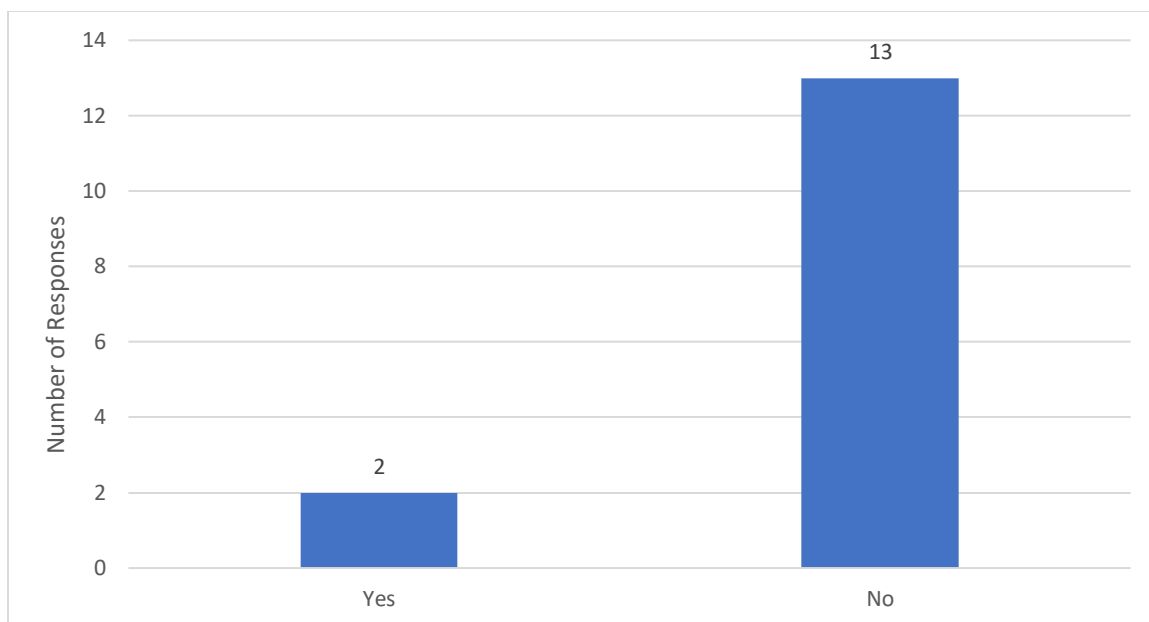


Figure 5. Interest in the Certificate in Religious Education

It is important to note that during the first seminar gathering, it became clear that all the students participating in the research project were from a Protestant background. This was a little disappointing, as a mixed group would have created a richer environment in which to engage in our discussions. It was also a little disappointing, that only two out of the fifteen participants are currently taking or would consider taking the Certificate in Religious Education. It is impossible to know for sure the reasons for this low figure but it is sadly indicative of our divided society and segregated school system in Northern Ireland. JW wrote 'I don't want to teach in a Maintained (Catholic) School, so there is no point in me doing it.'

There is no escaping the fact that the course is aimed at providing students with the qualification necessary to gain a teaching post in a Catholic Maintained Primary School and is generally referred to as the 'Catholic Certificate'. This unfortunately compounds division within the Northern Ireland education system and it is still in my experience very unusual for Protestant students to study for a Certificate in RE. This is disappointing given the very strong biblical and theological content of the courses (See Appendix 3 and Appendix 4). I believe all

students regardless of their religious background, would find taking one of the training courses currently available helpful in building their confidence and enable them to be better equipped to deliver RE.

However, I recognize there are significant difficulties which need to be overcome if a greater number of students are to undertake the training currently being offered to Stranmillis Students via two distance learning routes. It is hoped that in the near future the qualification can be offered at Stranmillis in conjunction with St. Mary's University College, our sister teacher training college in Belfast. This will provide an opportunity for students to undertake a Certificate in Religious Education supported by Stranmillis Faculty and Chaplains, alongside our Catholic colleagues from St. Mary's, an important step forward. Following a meeting with members of the TRC,⁹ it is hoped that the new Certificate in RE can be introduced as soon as possible.

Question 11. Do you believe it is your role as a teacher to communicate the gospel?

Three out of the fifteen students agreed with the statement but twelve indicated that they did not believe it was their roles as a teacher to communicate the gospel. Given their strong views on the inclusion of RE and the nature of the NI RE Curriculum this was initially a little confusing to me. However, in examining the responses to Question 12 relating to Christian practices in the classroom and general discussions within the focus groups, it became clear that the majority interpreted the question about communicating the Gospel as referring to proselytization. Figure 6 clearly shows the students seek opportunities to integrate and speak about their faith in the classroom, which could arguably be considered as ways in which they are

⁹ Transferors Representative Council (TRC)- an unincorporated Council with a membership from the three largest Protestant Churches in Northern Ireland (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist). It was created to ensure a united voice representing the churches as former owners of schools transferred to the control of the State.

communicating the Gospel. The bar graph indicates the frequency with which they engage, talk about or refer to Christian ideas and practices in school.

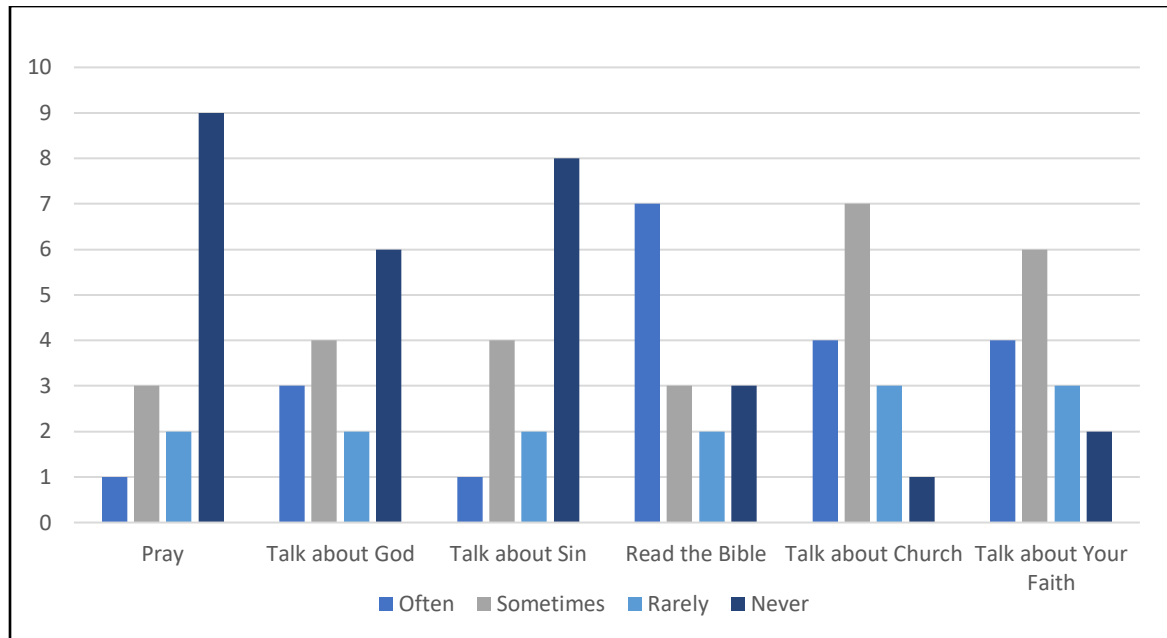


Figure 6. Christian Ideas and Practices in the Classroom

As the graph shows students do have opportunities to talk about God, Church and their faith in the classroom. However, 12 out of 15 indicated that they rarely or never pray within the classroom, this despite the fact that there is a legal requirement that a daily act of Collective worship be observed in every school. It would be interesting to compare these findings with the practices of in service Christian teachers from ten or twenty years ago to see if there has been a decrease in the frequency of prayers being said in the school classroom. It is clear from the questionnaire and from discussions in the focus groups that emerging generation student teachers feel uncomfortable about praying in the classroom, whereas in the past, it would have been common practice in most schools at the start of everyday and before meals to say a short pray or the grace.

The final question from the questionnaire that I want to highlight is Question 20 in which I asked participants to identify challenges facing Christian teachers in schools today. I felt it was important to allow an opportunity for an open question at the end of the questionnaire, as it allowed the students to articulate what is of greatest concern to them and provided me with useful insights into the things which are of greatest concern to the students.

Question 20. What do you believe is the greatest challenge facing Christian teachers in Northern Ireland today?

MR: Transgender issues. I have absolutely no idea where to begin.

JK: I think the biggest challenges are related to identity and sexuality. I am concerned that the Biblical view of marriage and sexuality are being rejected in our schools and that anyone who holds to a Christian point of view is labelled as being homophobic.

JS: Gender and sexuality are definitely the biggest challenges for Christian teachers.

JW: I have no clue how do deal with LGBTQ issues in the classroom, it worries me. I don't want to be judgmental but equally I don't want to ignore what the Bible says.

RG: Mental health and well-being. There are so many demands placed on teachers today, it seems you have to be an expert in everything.

NB: Being allowed to talk about your faith in school. I want to be able to tell children about Jesus and how much he loves them but am not sure I can.

Initial Observations

The results of the questionnaire provided very valuable insights as I approached the seminar series. Firstly, it was clear that there was a very strongly held belief amongst this group of students that RE is a crucial or very important element of the school curriculum. When combined with the high levels of familiarity with RE Curriculum (Appendix 5) it is clear that these emerging adults to have an interest and commitment to delivering RE in Northern Ireland schools and believe that faith should not be reserved as purely a private matter but that Christianity has a place in the public square.

My second observation is that whilst they indicate a strong desire to ensure Christianity is upheld within the public square of our education system, they lack confidence delivering RE in

schools and are unsure how to integrate their faith with their classroom practice. As the majority of participants have not yet completed their full training it may be that their confidence in delivering RE will have grown by the time they graduate. But it is concerning given the content of the RE Curriculum that a group of committed Christian students, most of whom have attended church their entire lives, feel ill equipped to teach the subject. This maybe reflection of the type of teaching they have received in their church or youth ministry or it maybe they do not connect what they have been taught at church as relevant in relation to their teaching or it may be a combination of both. I hoped that over the course of the seminar series I would be able to offer them some wisdom and that together we might be able to discern the best approach to dealing with some very difficult and sensitive issues. If it was possible to achieve these two goals by giving the students some tools to take away with them at the end of the process, then I would count the seminar series a success.

Seminar Week One

The fifteen students gathered in a large flexible classroom space on the top floor of Stranmillis University College. The room was selected as it allowed plenty of breakout space for the focus groups and is equipped with a smart board at either end of the room which facilitated easy transitions between lecture input, focus group discussions and interactive exercises. Being able to spread the three groups out within a large room also produced better quality audio recordings, making the content of the discussions easier to transcribe. The room also provided enough space to serve food, something which I was keen to do as a way of saying thank you to the students for giving of their time and as a way of modelling the Christian practice of hospitality in the classroom. Including the practice of hospitality and fellowship around a meal was highly intentional. As it was considered important in creating a more positive research

environment for the participants and as an opportunity to model Christian practices in the classroom.

Introduction to the Focus Group

As we gathered around the table to eat, I asked each participant to introduce themselves and share why they had decided to come along. This gave everyone an opportunity to get to know one another a little at the start of the process. It also gave me some insights into what had motivated each participant to attend. Some of the participants shared that they had decided to participate as a way in which to explore how their faith connected to their sense of calling as a teacher. Three participants indicated that they were RE specialists and hoped the course would give them some ideas they could use in the classroom. Others spoke of feeling torn between whether to go into the classroom as a teacher or become a youth pastor or Christian Schools worker because they wanted greater freedom in relation to evangelism and discipleship. Nearly all mentioned a Christian teacher who had been a wonderful example and witness for Christ during their time in school and hope that they could be that kind of teacher themselves. By sharing food and fellowship together, everyone had the opportunity to be introduced to all the other members of the group and were able to share a little bit of their own story in a very relaxed environment.

Teaching and Christian Vocation

As we finished our food, I asked everyone to move to the front of the classroom and I began to share the teaching input for the first session. I explained the rationale for the *Teaching and Christian Vocation* seminar series and referred to some of the examples they had just shared about the way in which a committed Christian teacher had shaped and influenced their

lives. I was able to highlight that in each case the teacher was living out their calling or vocation as Christian teacher.

If their lives had been impacted by the witness of a Christian teacher, many of whom may be unaware of the impact they have had on their pupils, how much more impact might it be possible if they could be even more intentional about the ways in which they teach RE and seek to share Christ in our schools?

I wanted to begin by framing our conversation within the context of the Northern Ireland Education System, recognizing that it affords Christianity a significant protected status within Northern Ireland's schools. It was pointed out that this is very different from many postmodern societies where there is separation of church and state with little or no religious education taught in schools e.g. France and the United States of America. In contrast, Northern Ireland's Department of Education website states the following:

Religious education (RE) is a compulsory part of the Northern Ireland curriculum, although parents have the right to withdraw their child from part or all of RE or collective worship. Schools have to provide RE in accordance with the core syllabus which was drawn up by the four main churches and specified by the Department.

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, Articles 21-22 (as amended) states, 'the school day in every grant-aided school must include collective worship whether in one or more than one assembly.'

It was important to highlight the legal position and emphasis placed on Christianity in our schools. However, it became obvious very quickly from the discussion in the room that the lived experience of the students showed there is massive variation in how the law is being applied in relation to collective worship and the priority being given to RE as a subject.

RG: I have been on teaching practice in a school where there was no daily assembly and the weekly assembly never focused on God or faith. It was really just a time when notices were passed on and the 'Star Pupil' prizes were handed out. Sometimes the Principal added in a wee moral message about being good or helpful or something.

JB: When I went to Primary School our teacher always prayed before break and lunchtime with us but I can't imagine any teacher feeling comfortable about doing that today. I certainly would not pray with any of my classes, in case a parent would complain.

AG: The school I was in on teaching practice last year didn't really bother teaching RE. The teacher told me it was because there was not enough time to get through everything.

JH: The class I have been with this term do RE every week and really enjoy it. The teacher is a Christian and I think she just makes it a priority because it matters to her and she sees it as part of her job as a teacher...I think.

JW: I know there was a big row in a school last year because the Principal invited a Christian group into take an assembly and some parents complained about it. It was on the BBC and in the Belfast Telegraph...I think there is definitely a climate of fear amongst Christian teachers that they could lose their job.

In an article featured in the Newsletter, Peter Lynas NI Director, Evangelical Alliance described a shift taking place within Northern Ireland society. He wrote 'The arc of change seems to be moving against Christians.'¹⁰ Mr Lynas, previously a barrister, asked a series of legal questions including, "Must a teacher or fellow pupils use the preferred pronoun of a transgender schoolchild? It may well be wise to, but do they have to - are they compelled to - on threat of legal action against them?"

It is clear from the discussion detailed above and the findings of the pre-seminar questionnaire, that student teachers are aware of and experiencing the changes that are taking place in our schools, as Northern Ireland becomes increasingly secular. It may take some time for the legal position to be formally changed but it seems safe to assume that the direction of travel will be away from Christianity rather than a strengthening of what already exists. The participants were asked to think about this question: *How would you go about being a Christian*

¹⁰ Peter Lynas, "Arc of Change Against Christians," *Newsletter*, October 31, 2016 accessed 29 November, 2017, <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/peter-lynas-arc-of-change-seems-against-christians-1-7654311>.

teacher if the law changed and our schools became secular? This question provided the segue into the second part of the seminar and my material on the importance of Christian Worldview.

Christian Worldview

God's Story – Genesis to Revelation

The starting point for Christians when thinking about any subject including worldview must begin with the fundamental good news of biblical religion, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians need to understand the ways in which God's story unfolds from the pages of Genesis to Revelation and what it tells us about the structure, pattern and purpose of our lives as followers of Christ. In the postscript chapter added to *Creation Regained*, Wolters and Goheen describe the Biblical story of being a six-act play, which tells the universal history, the true story of the world.¹¹

Act 1 - In Genesis, Chapter 1, God created the world and declaring it to be very good:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters...Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1: 1-2; 27-28 and 31)

Act 2 - In Genesis, Chapter 3, the impact of the Fall touches all of creation resulting in a conflict between good and evil:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

Act 3 - In Genesis, Chapter 12, and Exodus, Chapter 19, God announces His rescue mission and declares that good will overcome evil. He calls a people unto himself and imparts to them his

¹¹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 2005), 123-124.

redemptive mission for the world. Israel is called to be a light to the nations, a redemptive sign filled with the power of God to bring hope to all peoples.

Initially hope faded as God's chosen people turn their back on his ways, as they too were overcome by the consequences of evil and chose sin over God. However, through the prophets God promises the Messiah will come to usher in God's eternal Kingdom on earth, as sin and death are banished and the earth is renewed:

The Lord had said to Abram, go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said:

This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. (Exodus 19:3-6)

Act 4 - In Luke, Chapter 4, Mark, Chapter 1, and Matthew Chapter, 12 God keeps his promise when Jesus comes. God declares that He is fulfilling Israel's call to bring to bring hope and salvation to God's broken world. Through his life, death and resurrection Christ reveals and demonstrates God's victory over evil and the coming of His Kingdom:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:18-19)

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The time has come, he said. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news! (Mark 1:14-15)

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matthew 12:28)

Act 5 - In John, Chapter 20 and Matthew, Chapter 28, Jesus' disciples are given their Kingdom calling, to be witnesses to the work of Christ in the whole world:

Again Jesus said, peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. (John 20:21)

Then Jesus came to them and said all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Act 6 - The final act of the play described in Revelation, Chapter 22, we see Christ return, bringing judgement to those who have rebelled against God and to complete His work of renewing the whole of creation:

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5)

Wolters concludes, "To miss the grand narrative of Scripture is a serious matter; it is not simply a matter of misinterpreting parts of Scripture. It is a matter of being oblivious to which story is shaping our lives."¹²

Biblical Reflection

The group divided up into three smaller focus groups creating the opportunity for the students to engage with passages for themselves. It was only possible to allow twelve to fifteen minutes worth of discussion at this point, as a significant number of the participants had other commitments immediately following the seminar. A focus for the discussions was ensured by asking everyone to consider two questions:

¹² Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 125.

1. *What is the importance of having a coherent understanding of the Christian worldview in order to be able to teach the RE Curriculum in Northern Ireland?*
2. *How does understanding God's Big Story impact on your sense of vocation as teachers?*

God's Story as an Educational Framework for Teachers

It was important to build upon this understanding from of a biblical worldview by providing the students with an accessible framework within which to understand their role as teachers.

Having been powerfully impacted by a David Arms painting that Walt Mueller shared with us during our first Emerging Generations Residency this was used alongside the book *Creation*

Regained to develop an 'Educational Framework for Christian Teachers'.

In his painting *God's Story*, David Arms beautifully illustrates God's Story as a redemptive drama in four parts:

1. Creation – when everything was as God meant it to be.
2. Fall – the tragic intrusion of sin and death, resulting in the pervasive brokenness of all people and everything God has made.
3. Redemption – God's astonishing promise to redeem his fallen image-bearers and creation through the grace-full work of his Son, Jesus Christ.
4. Consummation – the magnificent fulfilment of God's plan to gather and cherish a people forever, and to live with them in a more-than-restored world, called 'the new heaven and new earth.'¹³

The image was projected onto the screen at the front of the classroom and each participant also received a personal copy of the picture, as a take away resource from the first seminar. I then talked through each panel of the painting detailing my educational framework, which

¹³ Scott Smith, "God's Story", September 9, 2007, *Scotty Smith Blog*, accessed October, 21, 2017, <https://davidarms.com/gods-story>.

additionally drew on Scotty Smith's interpretation of the painting alongside my own pedagogical reflections for Christian teachers.



Figure 7. God's Story¹⁴

Panel One: Value

The first panel is full of life and goodness, an indication of the wonder, truth and beauty of God's creation. The tree of life is standing tall and strong, offering shelter from the sun, as it casts its shadow. The three Chickadees, represent life including Adam and Eve along with all of creation, as they sing God's praise. The apple is a sign of God's provision and the loving boundaries he put in place to protect Adam and Eve. This panel reminds teachers that their job is to value and treasure every pupil as a unique and special part of God's good and precious creation.

Christian teachers above all, should have a deep love and commitment to their pupils because they recognise their value in the eyes of God. In an educational culture in which intelligence, strength and 'fitting in' determine your identity and value, Christian teachers must

¹⁴ David Arms, God's Story, Christ Community Church, Franklin Tennessee.

convey the truth of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, that all are significant and valuable because they have been made in the image of God.

Panel Two: Brokenness

The creation loses its colour as the dark clouds of sin and death replace light and hope. One of the 'life-swallowing' ravens looks back at the glory of Creation lost in the Fall. The other looks ahead suggesting that the Fall will not be the final chapter in God's story. Smith explains, 'Ravens appear in the Biblical narrative, and the history of literature, in two distinct ways. These ominous black birds are often used as a symbol of death and God's judgment.'¹⁵ For now the world is broken, all is not as it should be. Christian teachers must not shy away from the harsh realities of a broken and fallen world.

One of the greatest gifts we can give our pupils, is to acknowledge the tough stuff and meet them at their point of need. To do this well, Christian teachers need to think through their engagement with culture. If Christians adopt a Christ against culture approach,¹⁶ in which all expressions of culture outside of the church are viewed with a high degree of suspicion, irreparably corrupted by sin and to be avoided at all costs, then they may miss opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Adopting a Christ transforming culture approach, allows Christian teachers to carry His light into their classrooms as they care for pupils whose lives may be broken as a result of family breakdown, addiction, violence, mental health challenges and much more. The starting for Christian teachers may be to first acknowledge any pain or suffering their pupils are experiencing and then find ways of teaching that are infused with the compassion and understanding of Christ.

¹⁵ Scotty Smith, "God's Story," August 4, 2009, *Naperville Presbyterian Church Blog*, accessed September 14, 2016, <http://npchurch.typepad.com/discipleship/godsstory.pdf>.

¹⁶ Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins), 46.

Panel Three: Love

As God's Story unfolds in the Bible, love speaks from every page. The cross in the centre of the tree is a powerful symbol of love and a reminder God's great love for us, so much so that He sent Jesus to rescue us.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, love triumphed over death. When a disciple walks into their classroom, they should carry with them not only their books, lesson plans and long list of tasks for the day ahead but the love of Christ. Believers carry with them the extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit into every situation, which means we are able, with God's help, to love deeply all those we teach, even those who are difficult to love. In Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus commands his disciples to:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew Chapter 5:44-48)

Panel Four: Healing

In this last panel, the tree of life is much larger as it points towards the final consummation of God's Story in Revelation, Chapter 22, 'No longer will there be any curse' (Revelation 22: 3). Things will be put right, healing will come. This panel reveals the ultimate destination, serving as a powerful reminder to Christian teachers to keep moving forward, trusting in Him. And knowing that one day God is going to restore order and peace to all of His creation. For now, His people are to bring healing and hope to the nations.

The painting serves as a useful educational framework within which to make sense of the ways in which teachers can connect God's Big Story to their work in the classroom. It reminds Christian teachers that in some ways their job is rather simple. Value everyone because

all are made in the image of God with unique gifts and talents. See pupils as God sees them rather than through the eyes of the world. Acknowledge that the world is broken. That life can be tough at times, pain and suffering are everyday realities for lots of pupils. Sometimes simply saying I see you or I hear you in your pain, suffering and confusion maybe enough. As Christian teachers let's not ignore the hard stuff, let's meet children and young people at their point of need. We can walk into the dark spaces because as believers we live with sure and certain hope that on the cruel cross, Christ conquered the darkness once and for all. So, we hold onto and out the hope of Christ, trusting that one day His truth and justice will reign, restoring all things.

At the end of the material, I asked the participants if they had previously received any teaching in this area. A few students remarked that they remembered looking at a Bible Timeline produced by Scripture Union in Sunday School but concluded that it focused mainly on events, rather than theology. Most agreed that this was the first time they had considered a biblical worldview and all indicated they had found it helpful to think about an educational framework based on God's Story.

RG: I really found the discussion about brokenness helpful. I think it is good to acknowledge things and to be able to understand why children face the difficulties they do sometimes.

JB: I maybe don't give enough time to understanding everything that is going on in the lives of the kids in my class. I think I am so busy trying to be positive that I maybe fail to recognise the reality of certain situations.

AG: Somehow it is helpful to see all the difficult issues we may have to face in the classroom as being part of a bigger picture.

JW: The Bible just makes sense of everything and I think it is amazing that as Christians we can really understand what is really going on and be able to bring that into our teaching.

I thanked everyone for their input and reflections. At the end of the session I felt we had covered a lot of good ground but I was conscious that we had not had sufficient time for discussion and promised to rectify that in the coming weeks.

Seminar Week Two

In this seminar, there was an opportunity to unpack some of the material from within the literature review and also some of the biblical and theological foundations discussed in Chapter Two. The starting point for this session was to build on the material covered during the first seminar regarding the importance of Christian worldview, briefly summarising some of the key points made by Keller in *Every Good Endeavour*.¹⁷

Keller stresses that our worldviews shape us, influencing the way we see and understand our work. In the book of Genesis, the Hebrew word *mlkh*—the word for ordinary human work—is used repeatedly to describe the work God does in creating the world. Keller argues that work is an intricate part of God’s good plan for human beings, whilst acknowledging the impact the Fall has had on every aspect of human life, including work. Therefore ‘all work and human effort will be marked by frustration and a lack of fulfilment.’¹⁸ Work itself is not a curse but the impact of sin in this world means that we will encounter difficulty and strife in our working lives.

Keller also uses a powerful metaphor to speak of the opportunities Christians have to use their working lives as a way of blessing others. Drawing on the metaphor of ‘living in the palace’ based on the book of Esther but which also has echoes in the lives of Joseph and Daniel. All three individuals, found themselves in living in palaces with opportunities to use their positions to bless others.

What might be possible if you could see your workplace, your classroom, as a place of privilege that affords you the opportunity to invest your time and talents in the well-being of others? This is powerfully illustrated within the story of Esther which offers a powerful antidote

¹⁷ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavour: Connecting your work to God's work* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2012).

¹⁸ Keller, *Every Good Endeavour*, 90.

to the prevailing individualistic culture of the West. It also reflects the command given by God to his people when they are carried off into exile by Nebuchadnezzar,

Thus, says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29: 4-7)

This reminder from Jeremiah and the way in which Keller unpacks the story of Esther offer a vision of work which moves us away from viewing work from a selfish perspective, to seeing the opportunities we have to use our positions and skills to sow seeds that will help shift individuals and society closer to God.

It was deemed important to give participants an opportunity to consider the way in which their work in the classroom connects with God's big story and the ways in which teachers can shape culture in our society by seeking to fulfil the cultural mandate given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. For this reason, students had the opportunity to watch an excellent Q Commons talk delivered by Tim Keller on the subject of work and culture. The talk provided an inspirational perspective linking the discussion on Christian worldview in the first seminar to the discussion about work and vocation in this session. The students received a full transcript of the talk at the end of Seminar 2. See Appendix 5 for full transcript.

After the video finished, participants returned to the three smaller focus groups to facilitate discussion. In this session, the participants had twenty minutes to discuss the video and note down any observations or comments they wished to make about the material. Each group recorded their thoughts on a large sheet of paper.

It was clear from the discussions and notes that the students found the material to be very engaging and interesting. It was difficult to draw the conversation to a close even after

twenty minutes, as several students were passionately debating how Christians should engage with culture. One student was very clear that they would only teach in a school which had a strong Christian ethos. Another student felt that if all Christian teachers adopted this approach it would mean that fewer children and young people would have an opportunity to hear the gospel.

Another theme which emerged from each of the groups during the feedback from the focus group discussions was the challenge of being able to balance cultural relevance with biblical compromise. In each group, issues concerning gender identity were cited as an example of the challenges Christian teachers face in the midst of an increasingly secular society.

The final observation to note from the focus group discussions was concerning the significance of how the way in which Christians go about their work, helps shape the culture within schools. Many of the students talked about the example of Christian teachers and the role played by Christian Principals in setting the tone and direction within schools. The following comment illustrates some of the learning students gained from being able to listen to Keller connect faith, work and culture so brilliantly:

CM: I have always thought that the way in which I go about teaching could have a big impact on the kids I am teaching, in the same way as I was really influenced by a couple of Christian teachers when I was at school. But I have never thought about how the way I go about teaching in general could have a massive impact on shaping the whole culture of my classroom or school. I need to have a bigger vision of what God is calling us to!

In the second part of the seminar, I shared some material from Steve Garber's excellent book *Vision of Vocations*.¹⁹ The key idea being communicated is Garber's assertion that vocation is integral, not incidental in the lives of believers.

¹⁹ Steve Garber, *Visions of Vocation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

Everyday Ordinary

‘Seek the well-being of the city for when it flourishes, you will flourish’ (Jeremiah 29:7). Everyday ordinary people, living everyday ordinary lives, doing ordinary things, in ordinary places is the lived experience of most Christians. People live out their lives in families, communities, neighbourhoods and places of work. Garber states the credo of believers should be that vocation is integral, not incidental, to the *mission Dei*. In other words, our everyday ordinary work is an opportunity to participate in the mission of God in the world. God invites us to use our work as a means of extending His Kingdom, bringing the light and hope of Christ into every situation. In order that our work benefits not just ourselves but others in the places we inhabit. Garber says it is imperative that Christians recognise this means stepping into the mess of the world, understanding it and choosing to serve it.

Come and See Pedagogy

Simone Weil, on the last night of her life in the 1940's wrote that ‘The most important task of teaching is to teach what it means to know.’ If we know and see things as they truly are, having had our eyes opened to God’s big story running through all of history, then it our responsibility to teach that truth. Weil also wrote an essay called *On the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God*. An unusual title but one that Garber rightly points out it offers profound insights into the tasks of teaching, learning and vocation. Weil’s vision is based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, which she sees as emphasising the importance of paying attention to the things that matter.

Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, what is written in the Law? How do you read it? And he answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. And he said to him, you have answered correctly; do this, and you will live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? Jesus replied, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell

among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, the one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, you go, and do likewise. (Luke 10:25-37)

Weil wrote that the Samaritan is someone who pays attention to the things that matter and calls this type of seeing sacramental, because it is the kind of learning that connects heaven to earth. This parable allows us to understand that the most ordinary things of life can be made holy, if only we take the time to stop and truly see. Garber states:

That when we see all of life as sacramental, as the graceful twinning together of heaven and earth, then we begin to understand the meaning of vocation...We can begin to see that all of life, the complexity of our relationships and responsibilities – of family and friendships, of neighbours near and far, of work and citizenship, from the most personal to the most public – indeed, everything is woven together into the callings that are ours, the callings that makes us.²⁰

We should live fully integrated lives in which there is no division between who we are and what we do. In the Gospels, when Jesus was asked about his life, he responded with the words ‘come and see’. There is no sacred secular divide. As believers, our work and God’s work should be inextricably linked. Our teaching should be an expression of our faith and trust in God and a joining together of our work with the *missio Dei*.

Perched in time between Nietzsche’s 1873 meditation on how to find yourself and Parker Palmer’s contemporary manifesto for how to let your soul speak, the great educationalist John Dewey, examines the question of how we find our purpose and what makes for a deeply fulfilling occupation. He defines calling as a continuous activity having a purpose and argues that

²⁰ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 97.

such activity applies our natural gifts in a way that both fills us with a sense of aliveness and enriches the lives of our fellow human beings:

A vocation means nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his associates. The opposite of a career is neither leisure nor culture, but aimlessness, capriciousness, the absence of cumulative achievement in experience, on the personal side, and idle display, parasitic dependence upon the others, on the social side. Occupation is a concrete term for continuity. It includes the development of artistic capacity of any kind, of special scientific ability, of effective citizenship, as well as professional and business occupations, to say nothing of mechanical labor or engagement in gainful pursuits.²¹

Discussion on Vocation

When I had finished outlining these visions of vocation from Garber and Dewey, I asked the participants to get back into their groups and gave them six definitions of vocation, each printed on an image to help encourage a feeling and thinking response to the task. I asked each person to choose one of the definitions and explain why they had done so to the group. A copy of the resource is included in Appendix 7.

The exercise highlighted a range of ideas and understanding amongst the participants in relation to vocation. Three themes emerged from the discussions:

- Christian Ministry experience was a major factor in the decision to train to become a teacher.
- Working full time in Christian ministry presents more opportunities to share the gospel with children.
- Calling is personal, it is not about what other people think.

Almost all of the students indicated that this was the first time they had received any specific teaching or training on the subject of work or vocation. The following quote reflects the amount of teaching students had received in their home congregations on the topic of work.

²¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1997).

RR: My minister has mentioned work in sermons once or twice but it was really just about doing your best and working hard. I don't think we ever talked about it at youth group growing up.

This resonates with Kinnaman's sense that even young adults who are Committed Traditionalists, with a strong religious faith, seem to focus more on inner piety than they do on matters of social justice. If young adults have not grown up in an environment in which their work is seen as integral, then they will perhaps be less inclined to view their classroom through the lens of Keller's metaphor of 'living in a palace'. They will fail to see the opportunities they have to serve the wider community as an expression of their participation in the *mission Dei*.

Seminar Week Three

The focus of the third seminar was on the Bible and Education. It was important to search the Scriptures together for what God might have to say to a group of teachers seeking to live out their vocation in the classroom. It is also important because the Bible is the central focus of the Core RE Curriculum in Northern Ireland, therefore those who are training to deliver the subject in schools need to have good subject knowledge. The material drew heavily on *Bible Shaped Teaching* by John Shortt and also on a series of lectures delivered by Prof David Smith and Dr Shortt, at Stranmillis in June 2017.

The Bible and Teaching

Christians in the field of education have stressed that Christian education should not simply be secular education done better, but rather education which is shaped and delivered within the framework of Christian truth and values. "A Christian worldview takes as its starting point that the Bible is God's authoritative Word for life. Scripture is God inspired self-disclosure that calls for obedience and response...If the Bible is relevant for all of life, then it is also

relevant for education.”²² This should perhaps be especially true of an education system in which Christianity is written into the fabric of the core curriculum and ethos of most schools.

Regardless of the school type or context Pazmino lays down a challenge for all Christian educators when he says “Christian educators must carefully examine the biblical foundations for Christian education. Scripture is the essential source for understanding Christian distinctive in education.”²³ The Bible and education go back a long way but it is important to re-examine their interrelationship within the context of postmodernism and an increasingly secular society. Trust in objective reason, scientific investigation and technological innovation all of which played a major role in modern western culture, no longer provide the certainty that they once did. People are more skeptical and truth is considered as relative or subjective, dependent upon personal experience and the context people find themselves in. As a result of truth claims being seen as problematic, the role of the Bible in education comes under serious scrutiny. “If educational inquiry is to be understood as requiring a neutral starting point, a voice speaking from nowhere in particular, any substantive role for biblically orientated reflection seems excluded in principle.”²⁴

However, whilst Smith and Shortt acknowledge this is indeed problematic, they also argue that postmodernism can create spaces in which different perspectives and commitments are recognized. They suggest that “Once the role of particular perspectives and commitments are recognized as unavoidable, the possibility that the Bible might have something to say at least becomes more conceivable.”²⁵

²² Harold Van Brummelen, *Steppingstones to curriculum: A biblical path* (Seattle, WA: Alta Vista College Press, 1994).

²³ Robert Pazmino, *God Our Teacher: Theological Basics in Christian Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 17.

²⁴ John Shortt and David Smith, *The Bible and the Task of Teaching* (Nottingham, UK: Stapleford Centre, 2002).

²⁵ Shortt and Smith, *The Bible and the Task of Teaching*, 21.

The place of story within postmodern culture also presents an opportunity to connect the Bible with the task of teaching. Recent developments in both educational and theological debates have placed greater value on the importance of narrative in relation to how we understand ourselves and the world.²⁶ What if, by understanding the Bible itself as one grand narrative, we are actually speaking a language that can be understood by others unfamiliar with our doctrines but drawn to stories of ordinary people like them, trying to make sense of the world?

Metaphors and Teaching

Another feature of postmodern discourse is the use of metaphors, we think in and through images: the bloom of youth, the ship of state, the path of life. Are the metaphors contained in scripture that could be important vehicles for truth in the postmodern age? Or that might provide access to points to God's story for pupils in our classrooms? What biblical metaphors might help us understand teaching as an expression of our Christian vocation?

As a way of introducing the idea of Biblical metaphors, each participant was asked to write down a list of metaphors which they believe are useful in understanding the task of the Christian teacher. They were also asked to make a note of a Bible passage relating to each one. After some initial hesitation and uncertainty concerning what was meant by a Biblical metaphor, the students identified a number of metaphors and shared them with the group. The total number of times (n) each metaphor appeared on a participants list was recorded on a large tally chart at the front of the room.

The results were as follows: light (n=15); Shepherd (n=12); salt (n=10); stars (n=7); water of life (n=4); fountain of knowledge (n=1). The passages most frequently referenced were Psalm 123 and Philippians, Chapter 2. Two things can be noted from the responses. The Biblical

²⁶ Keith Egan, *Teaching as Storytelling* (London: Routledge, 1988).

metaphor of teachers being a light to others resonated very strongly with the group, as did the idea of being salt. In Northern Ireland the phrase, 'We are called to be salt and light' is frequently used within the church and the most widely used Sunday School curriculum is called *Light*.²⁷ It is therefore unsurprising that the group were very familiar with these particular metaphors. It is also worth noting from the discussions that took place in each of the focus groups, that Christian teachers who stood out from the crowd and reflected the light of Christ were significant factors in the lives of these emerging adults. The other metaphor which resonated strongly with the participants was that of Shepherd, reflecting the guiding and pastoral role played by many teachers in the lives of their pupils.

Teaching as Gardening

John Amos Comenius, the great 17th century Moravian educator, used the Biblical metaphor of gardening to describe teaching. He regularly wrote of learners as plants, learning as organic growth and the educational setting or classroom as a garden under the care of the teacher. In his most influential work, the *Great Didactic*, he declares that the seeds of learning, virtue and religion are 'naturally implanted in us.'²⁸ Comenius sees the school as a garden in which the task of the teacher is to 'water God's plants.'²⁹ This idea connects strongly with the horticultural images Keller referred to in the Q Commons talk shown in Seminar Two and also Matthew, Chapter 15 which contains many references to planting seeds - the parable of the sower; the parable of the wheat and the weeds; and the mustard seed.

The picture of a school as a garden put forward by Comenius, in which the pupils are plants that will blossom and flourish if given space to thrive, can be readily associated with the child centered educational philosophy of Rousseau – discussed in detail during the Year 1

²⁷ A Sunday School Curriculum published quarterly by SU England and Wales.

²⁸ Michael Keatinge, *The Great Didactic of John Amos Comenius* (New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1967).

²⁹ *Great Didactic* XVI:2.

Education Studies module at Stranmillis. Some have argued that this puts Comenius in the camp of educational progressives, who believe in the innate goodness of pupils and who consider the intervention of teachers as a potentially damaging intrusion. However, that would be to miss the theological foundation to Comenius, writings:

By the word nature we mean, not the corruption which has laid hold of all men since the Fall (on which account we are naturally called the children of wrath, unable by ourselves to have any good thoughts), but our first and original condition, to which as the starting point we must be recalled.³⁰

When Comenius is talking about human nature, he is not simply referring to the way things are or to humans as we find them in or classrooms and communities, but to the good creation, fractured and broken as a result of the Fall but recoverable through the redemptive work of God and his people in the world. In this sense, according to Smith, Comenius understands the work of the teacher, as ‘formative intervention’³¹ contributing to the development and flourishing of the child. Just as a gardener has to sow, tend, fertilize, water and skillfully prune their plants, so the wise teacher must nurture and care for their pupils. The challenge for Christian teachers is to undertake their role as gardeners, in the place where God has planted them, in ways that seek to encourage every pupil to reach their God given potential.

Comenius did not simply use the gardening metaphor as a helpful illustration of education, he wove scripture into the very fabric of his educational thinking. If taken in isolation, void of theological context, his theory becomes little more than image with which to frame the art of teaching. Set it within the theological context of scripture and it provides a clear Biblical rationale for the role of teachers in education.

³⁰ Great Didactic V:1.

³¹ David Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011).

Character and Competence

In this next section, the seminar switched focus from the task of teaching to the character and competence of the teacher him or herself. The concern was to consider what the Bible had to say about the standards God expects of His people and allow the students time to unpack three examples – Joseph, Daniel and Jesus.

Jesus is repeatedly referred to as teacher within the New Testament and much has been written about his teaching style and methods. Before turning to the Gospels in order to note some useful lessons from the life of Jesus, the stories of Joseph and Daniel in the Old Testament were selected as they provide strong Biblical case studies which offer wisdom and insights for student teachers entering the classroom at a time of significant social and cultural change.

What do the examples of Joseph and Daniel have to say to about the way in which God's people conduct themselves in public office? In order to become a qualified teacher in Northern Ireland you have to show that you are competent in twenty-seven different areas. What might the stories of Joseph and Daniel have to say about professional competence?

Once again, the participants divided into the three smaller groups of focus groups, in order to facilitate a greater degree of engagement and discussion. Each group was given two sheets of paper with a number of Bible references on relating to each story, one for Joseph and one for Daniel. (Appendix 6). The sheet also included a table with two columns, one for recording character notes and one relating to competence. The students reviewed each Bible reference and then discussed in turn.

After twenty minutes of discussion time, each of the groups fed back on their examination of the texts. It was pleasing to see the level of engagement and interest in exploring the two characters. The way in which Daniel sought to remain faithful in the context of a hostile culture was the strongest emerging them from the discussions.

AE: I kinda feel that Daniel is a really great example of someone who managed to navigate an alien culture and some pretty difficult characters well, so he is a good example for us.

AG: I think in Northern Ireland we, as in Christians, have had it so good for so long, that we are not too sure how to deal with all the cultural and social changes that are happening. So, the whole sexuality / marriage debate is an example of society moving away from traditional Christian values but no-one is really too sure what to do about it, so they either end up doing or making a big fuss. I think Daniel has a lot to say in terms of how to deal with a hostile culture.

PK: The way in which Daniel kept his boundaries clear throughout I find very impressive. He was able to be right in the middle of things in a position of real power but he never compromised on his beliefs, he stayed faithful to God even when he could have been tempted to compromise go for the easy life. It makes me stop and think of all the times when I have opted for the easy life and almost hidden the fact that I am a Christian.

ND: Reading over the story of Daniel again has really reminded me how important prays is and how I don't do it enough. The most important thing was his relationship with God and it was only because he kept that right, that he was able to stay strong and do a good job for the King and as a Christian.

The key point to note from the discussion concerning professional competency, was admiration for Joseph's planning abilities. One student suggested that if Joseph had been at Stranmillis he would definitely have been training to be a Primary school teacher! This drew much laughter from the group who agreed with this in-house joke, that B.Ed. Primary students are known for their superior planning and organization skills when compared to their Post Primary classmates. The point was perhaps more strongly made because of the humor attached to the observation.

An overview in relation to Joseph and his work which was adapted from the Theology of Work Project discussed in Chapter 3 was presented next. This material highlighted nine lessons from the life of Joseph:

1. Commit yourself to God first and then expect him to direct and establish your plans.
2. Pray that God would give you wisdom in all the decisions you will make now and in the future.
3. Acknowledge the gifts God has given you and use them to serve others.

4. Get to know the community and the people connected to your school.
5. Grow in knowledge and understanding so that you can excel in your work.
6. Work to practically meet the needs of the children in your care, knowing that God has placed you in the classroom to be a blessing.
7. If extra responsibilities and promotion come your way, never forget that your first mission is to be God's servant.
8. Even in difficult and challenging circumstances do not assume that you are out of God's will, ask Him to show you how to faithfully serve him in the dark places.

Jesus as Model Teacher

In the Gospels, Jesus is most frequently referred to as a teacher and throughout his earthly ministry we see a wonderful picture of the educating nature of Christ and his pedagogical skills as an educator. Charles Melchart, in describing Jesus as a wise teacher, lists an extensive range of teaching tools Jesus used to pass on wisdom: folk and literary proverbs; numerical sayings; riddles; rhetorical questions; beatitudes; admonitions and instructions; and perhaps most well-known of all, parables. The parables Jesus told made use of everyday experiences with which his listeners were familiar but which also challenged them to see things differently, offering new perspective as in Matthew, Chapter 5. The techniques that Jesus uses in sharing the parables could fill a modern text book on pedagogical practices. But the example of Christ, extends well beyond techniques and being able to tell good stories.

Jesus models what he teaches. His words and actions match. There is a deep integrity within his teaching. This is illustrated beautifully in the account of Jesus washing His disciple's feet. After he was done, he said to them, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet" (John 13:13-14). John Shortt comments, that the training Jesus gave his followers was based on an apprenticeship model in which he sought to apply their understanding of earthly work to their Kingdom work. Short notes: "Fishermen were to become

fishers of men, farmers were to become labourers in God's vineyard or harvest field. And Jesus was their master, not so much as a teacher of right doctrine, but rather as the master-craftsman whom they were to follow and imitate."³²

Rick Warren states, 'Christ-like character is the ultimate goal of all Christian education.' To settle for anything less is to miss the point of spiritual growth. We are to 'become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13). He goes on to say that developing the character of Christ is life's most important task and points towards Galatians 5:22-23, where Paul lists nine Christ-like characteristics, 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23).

The participants were asked to take a few moments to quietly reflect on the biblical examples of character and competency that had been discussed. They were then asked to write down on a post-it note, one characteristic or Christian value which with God's help, they would like to embody within their classroom practice. The post-it notes were collected and collated after the seminar, the results are shown in the table below:

Table 12. Christian Character Responses

Characteristic / Value	Number of Participants
Kindness	6
Patience	5
Love	4
Welcoming	1
Gracious	1
Compassionate	1

The seminar closed with a brief time of prayer during which several students asked for God's guidance as they seek to be good witnesses for Christ in the classroom. At the end of the class, six of the students indicated that they would be involved in an event as part of the Christian

³² Shortt and Smith, *The Bible and The Task of Teaching*, 87.

Union Mission Week, at the time we were due to meet the following week. It was therefore agreed that the group would take a break of one week and reconvene for the final seminar in two weeks.

Seminar Week Four

Teaching and Christian Practices

The final seminar in the series sought to build on what had gone before, with a greater emphasis on classroom practice than in previous weeks. Up until this point the focus had been upon the biblical and theological foundations of education; students understanding and sense of vocation and the characteristics of a Christ like teacher. The aim of this session was to provide students with practical ways in which they could incorporate Christian practices and values into their teaching, in order to help them integrate their faith and classroom practice.

According to James Smith, Christian education is not just about the transfer of information but also about the task of formation. The Controlled Sector Support Body (CSSC) in Northern Ireland, which represents non-denomination schools' states in its Ethos and Values 1.2.5 that it will "support the teaching of religious education, developing in children and young people moral values associated with the Christian faith, and encourage their spiritual development." The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools states "The Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the educational program."³³ So it is clear that the practice of religious education in Northern Ireland schools is intended to be more than the transfer of information or knowledge. It is as James Smith argues about formation. The question must therefore be, how do teachers help form pupils in the

³³ Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, "Catholic Education Ethos," accessed June 12, 2017, <http://onlineccms.com/index.php/publications/ccms-annual-reports-and-policy-documents/ccms-policy-and-guidance-documents>.

faith? When CSSC describes their schools as being places which reflect Christian faith and values, what does that look like in terms of classroom practice and the personal pedagogy of the Christian teacher?

Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra's define Christian practices as, 'things Christian people do over time in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world.'³⁴ Repeating something over and over again helps to form us as Christians, in an age of instant gratification, where there is a huge market for a quick fix of religious experience, Eugene Peterson notes 'there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations for Christians called holiness.'³⁵ In his wonderful book *Long Obedience in the Same Direction* Peterson describes the life of faith as a daily exploration of the constant and countless ways in which God's grace and love are experienced, noting that 'we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting.'³⁶ In other words, being intentional about building regular rhythms of worship and other Christian practices into our lives, helps to form us into the kind of people God is calling us to be.

The participants split into the three smaller focus groups again to consider the following question: *Which Christian practices do you most commonly engage in?*

The practices most frequently noted by the groups were: prayer, singing, reading the Bible, fasting, serving and giving. The first three practices were mentioned by all of the groups during a short feedback session. It was interesting to note, that no-one mentioned the practice of hospitality, discernment, forgiveness or silence/reflection, all of which are widely recognised

³⁴ Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," in *Practicing our Faith* ed. Dorothy Bass (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

³⁵ Peterson, *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 16.

³⁶ Peterson, *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 44.

within the literature as Christian practices that have a particular relevance for teaching.

Christine Pohl describes them as examples of 'practices within the practice of teaching'.

This indicated at least two things. Firstly, that the students were unfamiliar with the ideas contained in books such as *Teaching and Christian Practices* and secondly, that their understanding of Christian practices seemed to focus primarily on practices relating to the personal devotional time or corporate worship, rather than the practices related to living out their Kingdom calling in the world or within their classrooms. This resonates with Christian Smith's observation concerning emerging adults in the Committed Traditionalists category, who he concluded are more likely to view their faith practice as an individual private matter, rather than engage in practices which might inform and shape their working lives or in the case of student teachers their classroom practice. Smith notes "they seem to focus more on inner piety and personal moral integrity than say, social justice or political witness, and can keep their faith quite privatized."³⁷

With this in mind, the remainder of the seminar was spent considering the ways in which various Christian practices can be incorporated into the teaching and learning experience in schools. In their book *Teaching and Christian Practices*, David Smith and James K.A. Smith, explore a wide range of practices including: charity, hospitality, fellowship, testimony, breaking bread, curiosity, pilgrimage and liturgy. A brief summary of charity, fellowship, curiosity and liturgy were presented and reflected upon by the students, followed by a more in-depth exploration of the Christian practice of hospitality, which had also been modelled each time the group meet across the five weeks.

²⁹ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 166-167.

Charity

The practice of charity in education relates both to how we treat people and the works we are studying, i.e. books, paintings or other cultural artefact, deserve our time and attention. David Smith stresses the importance of allowing time to get to know a work (or person) within the learning environment and being prepared to look beyond the surface giving of our time as an act of charity to the pupils we are teaching and the subject matter being studied.³⁸ We can do this in lots of different ways but all involve our time and posture towards both people and works. I think Jean Vanier underlines what Smith is getting at when he articulates his struggle with being charitable with his time and posture, he reflects “Sometimes when people knock at my door, I ask them in and we talk, but I make it clear to them in a thousand small ways that I am busy, that I have other things to do. The door of my office is open, but the door of my heart is closed.”³⁹

Question: How might you practice charity within your classroom?

RR: Sometimes I am too quick to pass over a child who gives a wrong answer, my focus is on finding someone who understands and is quick to give the right answer. I suppose we are taught about the importance of formative feedback when using questions in the classroom but now I am thinking I need to be more charitable towards those children that don’t always have the right answer...by not just passing over them so quickly.

MR: In one of the schools I taught in last year, over 80 % of the children are entitled to free school meals and there was a lot of basic poverty amongst the families. I think if I was to end up teaching in a school like that, I would want to find ways of supporting those children who are unable to pay for school trips or who come to school in old shoes that don’t fit them. I know you have to be careful about boundaries but I think sometimes we lose sight that as Christians we are supposed to help those who are in need.

AE: I think one way that you can practice charity in your classroom is by making sure you give pupils the gift of time. I have seen how easy it is to be dismissive when children want to tell you something but the teacher is too busy to listen. I hope I can be the kind of teacher who always takes time to listen.

³⁸ David Smith and James Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, 172.

³⁹ David Smith and James Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, 178-179.

Fellowship or *Koinonia*

Fellowship is used to describe community and relationship between Christians, who are united through what Henry Scougal described as the 'divine life.'⁴⁰ This divine life is the indwelling of God in the soul of every believer, the presence of the Holy Spirit. Christians share this divine life when they exercise our spiritual gifts for the body. We share this divine life when we correct and encourage one another. We display and share this divine life when we love one another and when we mourn with those who mourn or rejoice with those who rejoice. The word fellowship is also translated as participation and sharing, perhaps providing a more obvious connection to classroom practice.

Question: How might teachers encourage pupils to participate or share in lessons, as a way of practicing fellowship within their classroom?

JS: By giving as much space for their ideas, as I do to my own.

NB: Looking out for the children who are being excluded by other pupils and trying to find ways to make sure they are included, especially during play time or in PE.

AG: I love using my ideas box when I am out on teaching practice. Basically, every Friday the kids all get to write down one idea for an activity they would like to do the following week and we choose one together.

JK: If you think of it as sharing, then maybe it is really simple things, like making sure everyone has the opportunity to play with the favourite toys or gets to use the iPads.

Following on from this discussion, I raised the importance of fellowship amongst Christian teachers. In Philippians Chapter One, Paul has some great advice as to how newly qualified Christian teachers develop intentional fellowship with other Christian teachers on entering the work place:

Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. (Philippians 1:3-6)

⁴⁰ Henry Scougal, *Life of God in the Soul of Man* (Edinburgh: Christian Heritage, 2005).

Three key ideas were noted. Firstly, the importance of giving thanks to God for our fellow teachers. Secondly, the importance of praying for and with each other regularly and thirdly, reminding each other that whatever the challenges we can have confidence in God. Two examples of prayer and fellowship groups for Christian teachers were then shared with the group – Oasis, the staff fellowship in Stranmillis and Cairnshill Primary School Prayer Group.

Curiosity

God has made an amazing world for us to discover and enjoy, full of beauty and mystery. He has also chosen to reveal His character throughout the pages of the Bible and in the person and life of Jesus. He wants us to be curious about who He is, what he has done and who we are. In his theory of faith development, first published in the 1970's, John Westerhoff identified four stages necessary for the acquisition of mature faith, the third of which he called *Searching Faith*. He explained the stage as 'a time of asking questions...not blindly accepting what others have said.'⁴¹

John Dewey, one of the most influential minds of the twentieth century, distils the purpose and ideals of education with remarkable clarity and conviction. He championed the role of education in equipping us with the sort of critical thinking necessary for questioning authority, deconditioning our 'mental bad habits,' and dispelling false beliefs and illusory ideas bequeathed to us by society. In his 1910 treatise on artful reflection and curiosity, *How We Learn*, Dewey writes:

Causes of bad mental habits are social as well as inborn... Over and above the sources of misbelief that reside in the natural tendencies of the individual (like those toward hasty and too far-reaching conclusions), social conditions tend to instigate and confirm wrong habits of thinking by authority, by conscious instruction, and by the even more insidious half-conscious influences of language, imitation, sympathy, and suggestion. Education has accordingly not only to safeguard an individual against the besetting erroneous tendencies of his own mind—its rashness, presumption, and preference of what chimes

⁴¹ John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York, NY: Seabury, 1976), 21-22.

with self-interest to objective evidence — but also to undermine and destroy the accumulated and self-perpetuating prejudices of long ages.⁴²

In the postmodern age, Christian teachers should be promoting curiosity and encouraging their pupils to test the ideas and values of the prevailing culture. Curiosity is essential if children and young people are to navigate life in the *Post Truth* age, with its perpetual cycle of fake news. Parker Palmer says ‘to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced,’⁴³ and John Dewey asserted that it is the task of every child centred educator to:

Cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to ingrain into the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves.⁴⁴

Maria Popova describes practicing curiosity in education, as fanning into flame the spark of wonder⁴⁵ that already exists in those we teach. She notes the words of Dewey:

With respect to curiosity, the teacher usually has more to learn than to teach. Rarely can he aspire to the office of kindling or even increasing it. His task is rather to keep alive the sacred spark of wonder and to fan the flame that already glows. His problem is to protect the spirit of inquiry, to keep it from becoming blasé from overexcitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise upon trivial things.⁴⁶

⁴² John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston, MA: Dover Publications, 1997), 105.

⁴³ Parker Palmer, *To Know as We are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986).

⁴⁴ John Dewey, *How We Think*, 103.

⁴⁵ Maria Popova, “Brain Pickings Blog”, 19 September 2014, accessed November 30, 2017 <https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/10/20/john-dewey-democracy-and-education-calling/>

⁴⁶ Dewey, *How We Think*, 84.

This echoes the wonderful work of Kathryn Copsey,⁴⁷ in her children's ministry book *From the Ground Up* and also the pedagogical approach adopted within the Orange Curriculum which emphasis Wonder, Discovery and Passion in teaching children and young people at the Christian faith.⁴⁸

Liturgy

James K.A. Smith states that Christian education is not just the communication and dissemination of Christian content but “the formation of a people who are defined by a certain telos – namely, the shape of the coming Kingdom, I am convinced that at the heart of this task is the conversion of the imagination enacted through intentional practices that are tactile, bodily, repetitive, and narrational.”⁴⁹ This challenges Christian teachers to consider ways in which their pedagogical practice might be Christian, in addition to the communication Christian information or knowledge. Students were provided with a photocopy of an experiment Smith carried out with a philosophy class in which he sought to use practices that provided a liturgical structure to his teaching. The pedagogical experiment is called ‘Keeping Time’. There was not time to look at the case study in detail during the seminar but it was hoped in providing the students with a copy, they would take it away and review it in their own time. However, the following quote from Christian Smith was highlighted to the participants for their deeper consideration, ‘Humans always and everywhere use time to invest their lives with meaning through stories.’⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Kathryn Copsey, *From the Ground Up: Understanding the Spiritual World of the Child* (England: Barnabus, 2005).

⁴⁸ Rethink Publishing, “Orange Curriculum 2017: 252 Basics” accessed October 30, 2017 <http://thinkorange.com/252basics/> accessed 30/10/17.

⁴⁹ David Smith and James Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, 4.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Souls in Transition*, 8.

The following might be considered examples of liturgical practice within education or school communities. Whole school assemblies are ritual activities that provide a liturgical structure to education, even when being conducted in non-denominational schools. Parents and pupils cheering on their school hockey or rugby teams during big games are rituals of community spirit. School prize days, awards ceremonies, school fairs, and parent's evenings are all events in which we ritually and symbolically celebrate something of great value and meaning. Robert J. Starra writes that a defining feature of these rituals is that they are performed by the community to express a communal meaning, belief, or commitment.⁵¹

Considering the more intimate environment of the classroom, what might the opportunities for liturgical practice be? The importance of structure, repetition and rhythms are well documented when it comes to learning amongst younger children. So, having a regular structure and pattern to the school day, in itself a form of liturgy, is one way in which Christian teachers can carry a sense of the order and blessing of God into their classrooms. The use of visual timetables, now so common in providing reassurance and communicating safety and security to vulnerable children with autism and other SEBD. Might these serve as a reminder to all in the class that God offers us safety and security in Jesus Christ?

Good teaching requires planning, structure and order to maximise learning opportunities, in considering them not simply as steps which need to be followed in order to survive the day, or indeed to satisfy a visit from the school inspectors but as liturgical patterns, teachers have the opportunity to enhance learning and engage in educational practices that are formational for those they teach, and for themselves.

⁵¹ Robert Starra, "Liturgy as Curriculum: Dynamics of Liturgical Education," *Journal of Catholic Education*, 4, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 36-38, accessed October 30, 2017 <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/vol4/iss1/8>.

Hospitality

Henri Nouwen wrote that hospitality conjures up images of tea parties, bland conversation, and a general atmosphere of coziness but in ancient times, hospitality was viewed as a pillar on which the moral structure of the world rested. It included welcoming strangers into the home and offering them food, shelter, and protection. Providing hospitality also involved recognizing the stranger's worth and common humanity. Hospitality is an important Biblical theme and central to the Gospel story itself, as we are welcomed into God's family. Not only welcomed but adopted,

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:14-17)

Hospitality in the Bible is always rewarding and costly, as it was when Christ gave himself up for us in order that we might be called into God's family. Hospitality remains an important expression of Christian faith today, Nouwen writes, "If there is any concept worth restoring to its original depth and evocative potential, it is the concept of hospitality. It is one of the richest biblical terms that can deepen and broaden our insight in our relationships to our fellow human beings."⁵²

Luke Bretherton says that perhaps the best way to understand hospitality is in contrast to tolerance, a parody of love which is all that a modern society can offer without the fruits of a life of grace. Hospitality draws on the metaphors of feasting and celebration, on generous grace and confidence in who we are, and who we are in Christ.

⁵² Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1975), 66.

The Great Banquet of Luke, Chapter 14 and also the encounter between Peter and Cornelius Acts 10 provide to clear visions of Biblical hospitality. Both examples challenged the interpretation of holiness at the time, Bretherton points out "Jesus relates hospitality and holiness by inverting their relations: hospitality becomes the means of holiness, it is in Jesus' hospitality of pagans, the unclean and sinners that his own holiness is shown forth."⁵³

Bible Study on Hospitality

Read Mark 10:46-52; Luke 5:27-32, 18:15-17

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me! And Jesus stopped and said, Call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, Take heart. Get up; he is calling you. And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, What do you want me to do for you? And the blind man said to him, Rabbi, let me recover my sight. And Jesus said to him, Go your way; your faith has made you well. And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way. (Mark 10: 46-52)

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, Follow me. And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus answered them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5: 27-32)

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. (Luke 18: 15-17)

⁵³ Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian witness amid moral diversity* (Aldershot: Ashby Publications, 2006).

Question: What kinds of people does Jesus welcome?

Read Matthew 25:31-46

Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the King will answer them, truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:31-46)

How do the two groups of people respond? Why are they surprised? What does it mean that our welcome into the kingdom is tied to our having offered hospitality to ‘the least’?

Questions:

1. Share personal experiences of times when you have received hospitality. What were the components? Were you a stranger, guest, or host? Who has made room for you? When have you made room for someone?
2. What are some of your fears or uncertainties about welcoming strangers?
3. What simple acts of welcome could you practice within your classroom?

Christine Pohl, says that ‘those who offer hospitality are not so much providing a service as they are sharing their lives with people.’⁵⁴

Reflection:

Think of a time when you, or a group to which you belong, were treated as if you were unimportant, uninteresting, or simply not there. Imagine what it would feel like if a whole society treated you that way. Relate your feelings to the experiences to a child in your class who

⁵⁴ Christine Pohl, *Making Room* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

is being bullied or is a newcomer, perhaps from a migrant or refugee family. How as their teacher might you show them hospitality in your classroom?

John Calvin attributed dignity to every person, regardless of their neediness, because every person bears God's image and because all persons share the human experiences of vulnerability and dependence.⁵⁵

Question: Why is it important that we have biblical and theological bases for respecting the worth of every person?

Opportunities and Challenges

In a contemporary culture in which a sense of community has often been eroded or only exists online, the practice of Christian hospitality in the classroom presents an opportunity to create a sense of belonging and place of connection for pupils.

Calvin warned against commercial exchange in extending hospitality. Christine Pohl in her keynote address to the Kuyers Institute of Christian Teaching and Learning Conference in October 2017, warned educators about the dangers of practicing hospitality in the hope that it will improve results or educational outcomes. Of course, it might but that is not the reason we should practice hospitality in the classroom.

Parker Palmer sees three things as essential in relation to classroom practice: openness, boundaries and an air of hospitality. He stressed that it is a different way of thinking rather than an extra thing to do. Teachers should practice hospitality, cultivating a learning environment and posture in teaching that offers welcome and encourages community. Practising hospitality within the classroom does not necessarily mean the teacher lacks authority. Tolerance yes but not at the cost of fidelity and truth. This is a significant challenge and resonates with some of

⁵⁵ Pohl, *Making Room*, 66.

the concerns expressed by the students in the last of the pre-seminar survey question and during the first seminar.

We must have a robust biblical and pedagogical basis for bringing the practice of hospitality into the classroom. Tolerance and fidelity make the classroom. Don't sacrifice one for the other, work at creating a mutual environment in which truth can be shared and spoken. All the time remembering that while we were still sinners Christ died for us and welcomes us into his family.

This section was the final piece of content delivered within the seminar series and at the end of the input, it felt like there was so much more left to explore concerning ideas of tolerance, postmodernism and the truth of the Gospel. This was discussed with the participants who indicated they would have liked some more time to discuss the ideas within their smaller groups. On receiving this feedback, it was agreed to include a question concerning hospitality and tolerance in the post seminar questionnaire to allow participants the opportunity to reflect further on the opportunities and challenges.

The participants were all thanked for their willingness to be involved in this thesis-project and for their wonderful engagement during each of the focus group sessions. In closing the final seminar, I reminded them that they would all receive a Smart Survey link so that they could complete an anonymous online post seminar questionnaire and seminar evaluation.

The post seminar questionnaire is included in Appendix 8 and a copy of the Stranmillis Course / Seminar Evaluation form is included in Appendix 9. The standard college evaluation form was used in order to ensure that the findings could be easily fed into the ongoing discussions regarding the development of a new Certificate of Religious Education in Stranmillis. Both research tools were administered using Smart Survey and sent to students via email, the day after the final seminar took place. The rationale for using Smart Survey was twofold. Firstly,

it was expedient in terms of time both for the participants and the researcher. Secondly, it guaranteed anonymity for the participants.

The findings from each element of the thesis-project will be summarised and a number of outcomes presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of the research project and seek to address the thesis '*How do Christian student teachers view their role in delivering religious education in Northern Ireland schools?*' As outlined in chapter One, the following will be addressed:

1. What can be learned from conducting this thesis-project?
2. How the insights can be used to improve the training and spiritual formation of Christian students at Stranmillis?
3. Propose ways in which the learning from this thesis-project can be integrated into a new Certificate in Religious Education to be offered at Stranmillis.

The findings of this thesis-project have been analyzed and a number of proposals are made. At the outset, it must be acknowledged that it is impossible to ignore the religious/cultural context when considering religious education in Northern Ireland's schools. It was clear from the pre-seminar questionnaire and discussions with students that there is still a reluctance on behalf of Protestant students to undertake a Certificate in Religious Education, which is rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Whilst it is hoped this may change in the future with the development of a new joint Certificate in Religious Education, a number of general recommendations concerning the spiritual formation of student teachers are offered in recognition of the religious and cultural challenges that still exist in Northern Ireland. The outcomes include a recommendation to develop an extended Teaching and Christian Vocation Course; a new mentoring programme for Christian students/ faculty; and a number of recommendations in relation to the new Certificate in Religious Education, which it is anticipated will be made available to all students undertaking initial teacher training at Stranmillis University College from Fall 2018. The proposals are informed by qualitative data

collected via in the pre and post seminar questionnaires, recordings from the focus group discussions, student evaluations and general observation made throughout the process.

To aid the discussion and provide structure to the final part of this thesis-project the findings will be discussed under the following headings:

- Views on the Religious Education Curriculum (NI)
- Christian Worldview in education
- Teaching and Christian vocation
- The Bible in teaching and learning
- Teaching and Christian practices

Before looking in detail at the outcomes of the project, some general observations about this group of emerging generation students and their views in relation to their role in the delivery of religious education are offered. The researcher believes that whilst not universally applicable to all Christian students at Stranmillis, the findings are very instructive as a new faculty member keen to support the spiritual, as well as professional development of her students.

If Stranmillis is to improve the preparation and training of students in the delivery of religious education in Northern Ireland's schools, then it is essential the college places students at the center of the process, taking into account the developmental challenges of young adulthood, the postmodern context and faith formation amongst emerging adults.

The Participants - General Observations

The eagerness with which each of the participants entered into the research project and their enthusiastic engagement with the material presented in each of the seminars appears to have been driven by two key motivating factors. Firstly, a deep personal desire to be effective witnesses for Christ in the classroom and secondly concern about how to navigate the increasingly secular and plural context of Northern Ireland in 2017 and beyond.

In relation to the first motivating factor, the research showed some contradictions in relation to students' perception of their own intrinsic motivation in deciding to become teachers and a reluctance to communicate the Gospel. All fifteen (n=15) students indicated that faith was *quite important* or *very important* in their decision to pursue a career in teaching and all fifteen (n=15) indicated that they believe a teacher's personal beliefs should be reflected in their teaching. However, as was noted in chapter four, only three (n=3) students indicated that they believed it was their role as a teacher to communicate the Gospel. This is interesting because the Core RE Curriculum provides clear opportunities for teachers to present the Gospel when teaching Religious Education.

In the pre-seminar questionnaire, all the participants indicated a strong desire to integrate their faith and teaching but were nervous about communicating the Gospel in their classrooms. This was confirmed by the anxiety expressed by many of the students during the first focus group discussions and examples of variations in the way schools apply the legal requirements concerning religious education and Christian worship across Northern Ireland. This leaves some students feeling unsure about what they can communicate in school and was even causing a number of them to question if they would enter the teaching profession. Four students (n=4) expressed a desire to work in full time Christian ministry rather than teachers, as they believed that would allow them greater freedom to communicate the Gospel.

As has already been discussed in Chapter One, this may be to do with their perception of what is actually meant by the phrase, *communicating the Gospel*. One student expressed concerns about being accused of proselytizing and a number of others stated this was a concern they shared. If student teachers see communicating the Gospel as a mini sermon or an evangelistic talk, this may explain their view that the role of a Christian teacher is not to communicate the Gospel. However, there may be other cultural and social factors that are at

play, including the privatization of faith identified by Christian Smith as characteristic of even the most religiously committed young adults.

Smith points out that *Committed Traditionalists* who “embrace a strong religious faith seem to focus more on inner piety and personal moral integrity than say, social justice or political witness, and can keep their faith quite privatized.”¹ Therefore, they may lack the experience, awareness or tools required to integrate their faith and classroom practice. This finding of the pre-seminar questionnaire confirms Smith’s assessment in *Souls in Transition*. It also points to the cultural observation offered by Ravi Zacharias, that in an increasingly secular society, faith is being privatised.

However, as emerging adults, their responses may also be reflective of the personal struggles associated with what Kinnaman notes is a period of significant transition. The students are still developing psychologically, socially and spiritually. In Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, Stage Four is labelled as *Identity vs Role Confusion*. Erikson describes role confusion as the individual not being sure about themselves or their place in society.² This may go some way in helping to explain a reluctance to articulate personal views concerning the Gospel in the classroom, as students feel unsure about how to navigate their role as Christian teachers in the context of wider society.

Whilst Erikson didn’t identify a separate life stage for emerging adulthood, he did comment on prolonged adolescence in industrialized societies and on the psychosocial moratorium granted to young people in such societies – ‘the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society.’³ If a student is experiencing

¹ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 280.

² Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York, NY: Norton, 1968).

³ Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 156.

role confusion or experimentation, they may be less willing to fully articulate their faith as part of their newly acquired professional identity as a teacher. It was clear from the students' responses that they had a clear sense of purpose and strong desire to make a difference in the lives of children and young people. They appear to be experiencing a tension in the degree to which they feel confident about their own identity as Christians within the public square and their desire to be faithful to Christ's call upon their lives. This is what Kinnaman describes as "the great struggle – of this emerging generation...learning to live faithfully in a new context, to be in the world but not of the world."⁴

Christian students face two very real challenges in this struggle, an internal one and an external one. Internally they may be struggling with deep questions regarding the nature of their own faith and the truth claims of the Gospel. Externally, they are trying to navigate that faith within a postmodern culture characterised by increasing levels of secularism and a plurality of other faiths.

Their internal struggle is synonymous with Fowler's Stage Four of Faith Development - *Individuative-Reflective Faith*. According to Fowler, within this stage individuals begin to question their previously held faith conceptions and may experience doubts as they try to figure out what they truly believe as individuals. This may also help to explain why young adults may be more reluctant to share their faith publically, as they move towards what Westerhoff describes as 'Owned Faith' or reject it. This usually occurs in young adulthood, following a period of searching faith in which there can be a reluctance to share or witness to faith publically while the internal struggle is resolved.

⁴ David Kinnaman, *You lost me: why young Christians are leaving church ... and rethinking faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 11.

The second motivating factor for their participation in the research project related to external concerns about how to navigate being a Christian teacher in the context of a rapidly secularising culture. Northern Ireland is often described as being socially and culturally behind the rest of the UK, as discussed in Chapter One. Whilst this might be true at a societal level, it was clear this group of young adults are affected by the wider cultural and social changes associated with postmodernism. They appear to be nervous about communicating the universal truth claims of the Gospel, more content to focus on how the Gospel shapes and directs their professional values as teachers, than delivering religious education that asserts the Gospel as true for all people, in all times. This maybe because they themselves do not believe the Gospel to be universally true or their hesitancy could be evidence of an intuitive sense of the prevailing culture and a desire to exercise wisdom in their professional lives as teachers, aware of what Lynas describes as ‘The arc of change moving against Christians.’⁵ It seems likely to be a combination of both.

This raises questions about the fundamental assumptions which underpin the RE Curriculum developed by the four churches twenty years ago. Families do not attend church in the same numbers they did twenty years ago, so the majority of children entering Primary One aged 5 have not attended Sunday School and have little or no knowledge of the Bible or who Jesus is. Their starting point in relation to religious education is therefore very different to previous generations in which nearly everyone in Northern Ireland at least attended Sunday School. New entrants to the profession, entrusted with delivering RE in schools are themselves part of a different generation, including those who consider themselves to be committed Christians. They see and experience the world in different ways to previous generations and this

⁵ Peter Lynas, “Arc of Change,” *Newsletter*, October 31, 2014, accessed November 29, 2017 <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/peter-lynas-arc-of-change-seems-against-christians-1-7654311>.

is likely to have a significant impact on the way in which they perceive and deliver religious education.

Ravi Zacharias quotes prominent sociologist Peter Berger who highlights the impact of change of on the place of Christianity in the public square:

Secularization is the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols...secularisation manifests itself in the evacuation by the Christian churches of areas previously under their control or influence as in the separation of church and state...or in the emancipation of education from ecclesiastical authority.⁶

The danger for emerging generation student teachers is that before they formally enter the profession, they may have fully or partially embrace the idea that faith should be privatised and inadvertently diminish the nature or impact of religious education and the core curriculum in Northern Ireland's schools. If this happens, the secular agenda will gain momentum and almost certainly seek to remove Christianity from its prominent position with the NI Curriculum.

For now, Christian students training to be teachers in Northern Ireland still have incredible opportunities to play their part in passing on the faith to the next generation. If they are to embrace the opportunities that currently exist, they need to understand what they are currently permitted to teach and how best to go about it. They need to know their Bible, understand basic theology and be trained to develop Christian pedagogies that allow them to be faithful to their calling. If they are to model best practice in the delivery of religious education, they must find ways to communicate the Gospel that are educationally and culturally sound.

Sherman believes vocational development is about being as creative, strategic, and intentional as you can be in deploying your gifts and influence to bring in foretastes of the Kingdom.

⁶ Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil* (London: Word Publishing, 1998).

It was clear that this group of students were committed to learning how best to do this. It was also clear that the vast majority of the group, thirteen (n=13) out of fifteen were not interested in completing the Certificate in Religious Education. This means two things. They will not be eligible for teaching posts within Catholic Maintained Schools upon graduating. More importantly in relation to this thesis-project, unlike their contemporaries studying at St. Mary's University College, they will not have had the opportunity to gain biblical, theological and vocational training in relation to the delivery of religious education. As Stranmillis looks to develop an integrated pathway for the delivery of a new Certificate in Religious Education, this thesis-project and integral seminar series has been an important first step in. It has also allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the professional vocational development needs of Christian students at the college. I therefore hope to be able to repeat and develop the seminar series in the future.

Views on the Religious Education Curriculum (NI)

In the initial questionnaire undertaken by the students the majority (n=11) indicated that they were very familiar with the RE Curriculum, however only five (n=5) students indicated they felt confident teaching RE. The majority (n=12) indicated they had only received a little training relevant to the delivery of RE, and only two (n=2) students indicated that they were taking or would considering taking the Certificate in Religious Education. These results may be influenced by the fact that only four of the participants were in the final year of their degree, so the majority still had a significant part of their training left to complete. However, it was clear from their initial responses that the vast majority of participants (n=13) did not see the Certificate in Religious Education as an opportunity to enhance their training so that they might become more effective in their delivery of religious education.

It must be noted that despite all the students having significant involvement in a local church and a wide variety of experience serving or being involved in various mission and ministry organisations, the participants still felt they had not received a lot of training that would assist them in the teaching of RE. Given the content of the NI RE Curriculum this is a little troubling. One would hope that Christian students who have grown up in the church and have been exposed to Bible teaching and Christian discipleship programmes would be able to see how that training or knowledge would be beneficial to them in relation to their delivery of religious education. However, it is consistent with some of the critiques offered by Bergler, Kinnaman and Shepherd, in relation to youth ministry and the church.

During the first focus group, it became clear that the students lacked subject knowledge of the material within the RE Curriculum. The examples students shared about teaching RE focused mainly on Bible storytelling and no-one shared examples of teaching about Jesus, the Christian Church or morality, despite these being core themes in the curriculum. Many students (n=7) expressed a reluctance to mention Jesus at all, or to describe him as anything other than a 'good man', despite the curriculum itself referring to Jesus as the Son of God. Some comments from the focus groups illustrate the views being expressed:

AG: I am worried if I talk about Jesus as the Messiah or God, that it will be a step too far. I kind of just avoid the bits of the Bible that talk about that stuff.

JB: Most of the children don't go to Sunday School...so their starting point is very different from when I was doing RE in school. I think you need to start with the basics and assume that they know absolutely nothing about the Bible. Having looked at the RE Curriculum tonight, I think it assumes way too much!

JW: I think the curriculum is good, it actually gives us way more scope to present Christianity than I thought.

In the post seminar questionnaires, nine students (n=9) indicated that as Christian teachers the most important element of the RE Curriculum was teaching about Jesus. Six students (n=6) indicated that teaching about the Bible was the most important element. Whilst

not conclusive, this indicated that the students appeared to have a more positive attitude towards teaching about Jesus after completing the course.

If student teachers at Stranmillis are going to be adequately prepared to teach the RE Curriculum they need to receive further training concerning the revelation of God; the Christian Church; and Christian morality. At present Biblical and theological material is only delivered to RE specialists training to deliver the subject in post primary schools. A close examination of the syllabi included in Appendix 3 and 4, will confirm that this subject specific knowledge is covered in both the St. Mary's Certificate in Religious Education and the Catholic Teacher's Certificate offered by the University of Glasgow, but as previously noted, only two (n=2) out of fifteen (n=15) participants indicated a commitment to or interest in completing this training. This is perhaps not surprising given 'one of the main characteristics of the Northern Ireland education system lies in the existence of parallel religious school systems for Protestants and Catholics,'⁷ which has also resulted in a parallel system of teacher education. This has lead the majority of students to view the Certificate simply as a way of ensuring they are eligible to apply for teaching posts in Catholic Maintained Primary Schools and sadly it is clear that the prospect of obtaining a job in a Catholic Maintained school is not in itself currently sufficient incentive for Protestant students to undertake additional training in Religious Education. Perhaps as Northern Ireland continues to be transformed into a more secular and multi-faith society what unites Christians, will become more important than what divides.

If Christian students feel ill equipped to teach RE then the introduction of a new Certificate in Religious Education at Stranmillis must be seen as a very welcome development. I

⁷ Tony Gallagher, "Religious Divisions in Northern Ireland's Schools" (paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, 21 May).

believe a helpful place to begin would be in recognizing the views and experiences of the participants in this study. It is important to be mindful of the religious context in Northern Ireland but it is equally important to be mindful of the wider cultural challenges facing young adults and how best to equip them to deliver religious education both now and in the future.

Outcome One:

Ensure the new Certificate in Religious Education provides opportunities for student teachers to develop subject specific knowledge and engage in personal faith formation, so that they see completing the qualification as more than simply a passport to obtaining teaching posts in Catholic Maintained Schools.

Christian Worldview in Education

In the second part of Seminar One, having had the opportunity to listen and reflect on some material from *Creation Regained*,⁸ the participants were asked to consider two questions in focus groups:

1. What is the importance of having a coherent understanding of a Christian worldview in order to be able to teach the RE Curriculum in Northern Ireland?
2. How does understanding God's Big Story impact on your sense of vocation as a teacher?

The participants struggled with both questions, spending their time discussing the notion of a Christian worldview, which appeared to be a new concept to most of them. The initial focus group discussions also indicated a lack of understanding in relation to vocation. They found it difficult to see how the grand narrative of scripture might provide a framework in which a Christian philosophy or approach to education could be located. On reflection, these questions

⁸ Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

were not well located within the overall structure of the research project. However, having adopted an interpretivist approach, the researcher was able to respond and adapt the process as it unfolded.

A collective and profound learning experience took place when unpacking the educational framework based on David Arms painting *God's Story*. This was one of the most transformational moments during the whole thesis-project. The participants were touched on both a spiritual and professional level, as was the researcher. Again, the strength of adopting an interpretivist approach was highlighted as it allowed the participants and the researcher to engage in collaborative learning.

The beauty and logical clarity that Arm's painting (Figure 7) brings to the Biblical narrative, provided participants with a means of understanding a Christian worldview, in many cases for the first time. The painting was in many ways more helpful than surveying key Bible passages, although starting in scripture did provide the foundation for our discussion. The image helped provide a connection for the participants between God's story, their own stories and the stories of the children and young people they teach. The energy in the room as they discussed the educational framework concerning the value of individuals; the brokenness of society; the power of love; and hope for the future was palpable. The connections made between a Biblical worldview and classroom practice were almost instant and having been presented with the concept of a Christian worldview, the students were able to apply the framework to their own philosophies of education. A selection of comments made in the focus groups are included below:

RG: I really found the discussion about brokenness helpful. I think it is good to acknowledge things and to be able to understand why children face the difficulties they do sometimes.

JB: I maybe don't give enough time to understanding everything that is going on in the lives of the kids in my class. I think I am so busy trying to be positive that I maybe fail to recognise the reality of certain situations.

AG: Somehow it is helpful to see all the difficult issues we may have to face in the classroom as being part of a bigger picture.

JW: The Bible just makes sense of everything and I think it is amazing that as Christians we can really understand what is really going on and be able to bring that into our teaching.

In the post seminar questionnaire, when asked how important is it for teachers involved in the delivery of RE in Northern Irish schools to have knowledge and understanding of a Christian worldview, twelve students (n=12) indicated it was essential, one (n=1) concluded it was very important, two (n=2) stated they were unsure. This was encouraging after a rocky start when looking at this material and confirmed that the students had progressed in their understanding of a Christian worldview. Not only that, they were also on the road to being able to apply some basic theological concepts to their own educational philosophies.

Outcome Two:

Identify additional opportunities for students to explore the application of a Christian Worldview to their future role as teachers, possibly through the addition of an extra module in the new Certificate in Religious Education.

Outcome Three:

Develop the educational framework presented during seminar one, with a view to being able to present it to a wider audience including churches, educational bodies and ministry organizations e.g. CSSC, CCMS, Scripture Union NI and Love for Life.

Teaching and Christian Vocation

Minori Nagahara writes of teaching and Christian vocation "Regardless of the role to which their abilities and deep gladness lead them, teachers soon discover that their profession

demands tremendous effort and commitment.”⁹ The purpose of including material on teaching and Christian vocation was to help the students consider the integration of their Christian faith and work as teachers. In the first instance, it was hoped that in exploring the topic they might more fully embrace their calling and develop a sense that vocation is integral, not just incidental to the mission of God.¹⁰ It was hoped that in helping students to view their role as teachers in this way they would be better equipped to deal with the professional and cultural challenges they will face during the course of their career.

As a non-denominational college, Stranmilis has not previously offered a course in Christian vocation, although the topic is covered as part of the Certificate in Religious Education. Therefore, the only teaching on vocation that any of the students had received prior to the seminar series had taken place within their local church or through their involvement with a mission or ministry organisation. In the pre-seminar questionnaire, the participants were asked if they had ever received any teaching on Christian vocation in their church. Four students (n=4) indicated that they had received some teaching about vocation at church but eleven (n=11) had not. One student’s comments were reflective of the general discussion which took place in the focus groups:

RR: My minister has mentioned work in sermons once or twice but it was really just about doing your best and working hard. I don’t think we ever talked about it at youth group growing up.

It was clear that with this particular group the starting point for discussing Christian vocation needed to be at an introductory level. However, it was also clear from their initial introductions and general discussions during the first seminar that the overwhelming majority of the group were motivated by their faith and viewed their work as teachers as an opportunity to

⁹ Minori Nagahara, *Teaching and Christian Vocation* (Texas: Baylor University, 2009).

¹⁰ Steve Garber, *Visions of Vocation* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2014).

serve others. Two comments from the focus groups capture the broad sentiment amongst the group:

JR: My Mum is a teacher and she reminds me every day before I go into school that I am not there to make an impression, I am there to make an impact.

RG: It's not about what I can do, it is about what they can do. I think good teaching is about finding the key that will unlock the potential inside every pupil.

The group engaged really well with the Q Commons talk by Tim Keller 'Why Culture Matters' and two interesting themes emerged in the analysis of the focus group discussions:

1. Cultural engagement
2. The importance of Christian ethos in schools

In relation to cultural engagement, the participants focused on the impact Christian teachers had on their own lives as children and young people. They also recognised that their starting point when thinking about their roles as teachers was largely focused on the individual impact they would have, rather than considering how they might contribute to the wider cultural environment of schools or society in general. The material from Keller really helped the students to see their role in the delivery of RE as having a much wider impact. The conversations in the focus groups also reflected a growing awareness amongst the students that all work is valuable and important in the Kingdom of God. This was challenging to a number of students who acknowledged that they probably needed to reconsider their perception that they could have a greater impact for Jesus in youth ministry than as a teacher. These comments are largely reflective of their views:

JS: When I think about God calling me to do something for him, I have always assumed that would mean working for a church or Scripture Union or something...maybe going overseas to teach. I have never thought of a getting a regular teaching post as a calling just a job really.

CB: If I am honest I have always seen training to be a teacher as a route into getting a Christian job. I love school and teaching but I really want to spend as much of my time as

possible telling kids about Jesus so I think I would rather work with CEF or SU. Now I am beginning to think that there are no Christian jobs, every job is important and valuable.

ND: I came into Stranmillis thinking that I would train to be a teacher so that I could get a job working with Exodus. I reckoned that it was a good degree to do if you wanted to work with young people. Having been out in schools now though and seeing all the issues children have to deal with every day, I would rather work in school now because I think I could probably make more of a difference.

Having originally trained to be a post primary Geography and RE teacher before moving into youth ministry for fifteen years, it was difficult not to get too involved in the discussions taking place. It was very tempting to offer my opinion but I tried to remain impartial, allowing the participants the time and space they needed to explore the theological implications of the cultural mandate for their work as teachers. The material clearly challenged them and caused them to think about their work as teachers differently.

In their responses to the two questions relating to vocation and *mission dei*, in the post seminar questionnaire, the students were able to reflect on the issues and appeared to have developed a greater understanding of teaching as an expression of their Christian calling and cultural engagement.

When asked to describe their work as teachers, five students (n=5) saw it primarily as pastoral care; four (n=4) saw it as an opportunity to help others grow; three (n=3) described their work as teachers as passing on knowledge or wisdom; and one (n=1) student focused on academic matters. It was also interesting to note in their responses that six (n=6) out of the fifteen students made reference to the fall in Genesis 3 when talking about the challenges and struggles they felt they would experience as teachers. The hope is that by being able to frame or understand challenges and struggles theologically, they will be better equipped to deal with whatever comes their way in school and be more resilient as a result.

Only eight (n=8) students provided a response to question 3b in the post seminar questionnaire, perhaps indicating the material about *mission dei* had not been well explained or

was too rushed during seminar two. Of the responses received the strongest themes identified for how teaching contributed to the mission dei were grace and love. The students were able to articulate Christ like characteristics as a key way in which they as teachers can demonstrate Kingdom values to their pupils.

The importance of Christian values within education was discussed in some detail by two out of the three focus groups, with two clear schools of thought emerging. One student who attended a private Methodist School in the Republic of Ireland shared her belief that Christians should teach in schools with a strong Christian ethos. She valued the education she had received and said she would want to teach in a school where her Christian views and opinions would be respected. She had particular concerns about gender issues and not being allowed to use the pronouns male and female. The student felt that this was clearly in conflict with God's word and that she would not be able to teach in a school that would not allow teachers to call pupils boys and girls.

Two students who had attended non faith-based schools in Northern Ireland felt that if Christians only taught in schools with a strong Christian ethos, then fewer children would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel. This conversation naturally led into a discussion about how to define Christian ethos or culture within a school. Whilst not being able to settle on a definition, the participants came to the conclusion that a Christian Principal was the key to a school having a Christian ethos. They also suggested that openness to having a Scripture Union in the school, local ministers being involved in Collective Worship and supporting the work of Christian charities, such as Fields of Life, were ways of articulating a Christian ethos within schools.

It was pointed out to the students that this is a complex area and that the CSSC has just established an Ethos Working Group to look at this issue across all their schools. Currently,

despite being ‘church related’ schools serving a broadly Protestant population and with Church representatives on almost every Board of Governors, there is no widely agreed ethos or educational mission statement in the 38% of Northern Ireland Schools that are within the Controlled Sector. Whereas in the Maintained sector, schools operate within a clearly articulated ethos of Catholic Education. The general consensus amongst the participants was that without a clearly articulated position on Christian ethos, schools and teachers were likely to come under increasing pressure to comply with a secular agenda and find themselves having to make difficult decisions in relation to a whole range of issues.

Seminar Two concluded by considering definitions of vocation as described in chapter four. This was not a scientific exercise but it proved to be a useful tool and opened up an interesting discussion about vocation in each of the focus groups. It also provided the researcher with a sense of how each of the participants viewed vocation.

Table 13. Definitions of Vocation Exercise

Image	Number of Participants
1 – Vocation is love	5
2 – Deepest longing, greatest need	5
3 – No special calling	0
4 – Vocation and inner self	0
5 – Vocation confirmed by others	2
6 – Teaching as a sacred priesthood	3

The responses to this simple exercise confirmed that amongst this group of student teachers there was a strong emphasis on love and compassion within teaching. There was also a clear sense that teaching as an expression of Christian vocation is about serving others, rather than self.

The challenge going forward is to consider how to nurture this sense of compassion within a biblical educational framework, so that it might inform classroom practice and help

Christian teachers recognise the everyday opportunities they have in their classrooms to participate in the *mission dei*.

Outcome Four:

Continue working with the CSSC Working Group on Ethos in the Controlled Sector but set within a biblical framework for education and with a greater emphasis on Christian vocation amongst teaching staff.

Outcome Five:

Establish a mentoring programme in Stranmillis which will encourage Christian faculty and students to develop their own sense of Christian vocation and how they can integrate their faith into their work as teachers.

The Bible in Teaching and Learning

The Bible is central to living a faithful Christian life and it is also central to the RE Curriculum in Northern Ireland. Christian students should therefore have a substantial advantage when it comes to the delivery of RE, over those with no Christian faith. Having personal knowledge of the Bible and being involved in a local church means that Christian students should have more biblical knowledge at the start of their training, than those who might fall into Smith's categories of *religiously indifferent*, *religiously disconnected*, and *irreligious*. However, as Christians this group of students appeared to lack confidence and struggling to integrate their existing bible knowledge with their delivery of RE, as indicated in their low levels of confidence in Figure 2.

The seminar in week three sought to engage students in a discussion regarding the theological nature of teaching. The biblical metaphor of teaching as gardening was considered as was the importance of character and competence. The biblical accounts of how Joseph and

Daniel both in challenging times were considered, alongside examples of good teaching from the life of Jesus.

Having reflected on the metaphor of teaching as gardening, students were asked in the post seminar questionnaire, to reflect on their role as an RE teacher in the faith development of their pupils. It was very encouraging reading through the responses to see the way in which the students were able to connect the gardening metaphor within the theological and educational framework discussed in seminar one. In relation to the teaching of RE as a subject, the majority of participants (n=13) made references to the idea of planting seeds and connected this to teaching from the Bible and or talking about God. It was clear they see their role in the delivery of RE, as an opportunity to tell children about God and communicate the Gospel. This felt like a moment of celebration as it provided an opportunity for the students to articulate an increased vision for the opportunities they have in school.

Eight (n=8) students made reference to the idea of helping children to flourish and connected their role to Comenius' idea of teachers as gardeners. The responses again indicated a growing sense of vision amongst the participants regarding their vocation and the ways in which they can make an impact in the lives of their pupils.

The material on character and competence spoke powerfully to the students. The language of competence being very familiar to them, as student teachers in Northern Ireland are assessed against twenty-seven different competencies before being granted their teaching licence. The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) also outline a number of personal qualities that characterise a good teacher. Linking biblical examples of character and competency in the lives of Joseph and Daniel with the professional language used by GTCNI allowed the participants to see how the Bible can help to shape and inform their professional practice as teachers.

When asked to reflect on how the example of Daniel might help them address the cultural challenges they identified at the start of the course two strong themes emerged. Firstly, the importance of prayer in their own lives, with twelve (n=12) students mentioning it in their response to question 4b in the post seminar questionnaire. Secondly, the importance of integrity when fulfilling a public role such as a teacher. Students mentioned the need to avoid compromises in relation to the surrounding culture but also emphasised the importance of modelling commitment and excellence within their work as educators. These findings echoed some of the comments made during the focus group discussions:

PK: The way in which Daniel kept his boundaries clear throughout I find very impressive. He was able to be right in the middle of things in a position of real power but he never compromised on his beliefs, he stayed faithful to God even when he could have been tempted to compromise go for the easy life. It makes me stop and think of all the times when I have opted for the easy life and almost hidden the fact that I am a Christian.

ND: Reading over the story of Daniel again has really reminded me how important prayer is and how I don't do it enough. The most important thing was his relationship with God and it was only because he kept that right, that he was able to stay strong and do a good job for the King and as a Christian.

Given the level of concern around how to handle difficult or culturally sensitive issues in the classroom, the importance of looking to scripture for guidance and wisdom was underlined. During the focus group discussions, the students identified the need for a space in which they could discuss these issues from a Christian perspective. They discussed feeling uncomfortable articulating a Christian perspective when issues such as gender or sexuality came up within the context of their Education Studies modules. This reflected a conversation amongst Christian faculty teaching on a particular module last year, in which some of these issues are addressed. Having listened to the students and being aware of the issues from a staff perspective, it seems important to explore the possibility of creating a forum in which these issues can be discussed. This will need prayer and careful consideration.

Teaching and Christian Practices

There is a real danger in education that teachers can forget the reason they decided to enter the profession in the first place. Overwhelmed by bureaucracy, ever increasing workloads and a system that measures educational success in terms of exam results, even Christian teachers can easily lose sight of what matters most - helping their pupils to flourish as God intends. Most teachers enter the profession determined to nurture and support their pupils in the broadest sense but soon find that most of their time and energy is spent on the transmission of intellectual knowledge to ensure their pupils receive the highest possible results. This is not how education should be and Christian teachers should be leading the charge when it comes to helping transform the culture of the education system in Northern Ireland. For if according to the Protestant churches, religious education in Northern Ireland's schools should provide opportunities for the spiritual development of pupils and Catholic Maintained schools aim to ensure that a Gospel spirit permeates all facets of education, what are we waiting for? Living biblically faithful lives and seeking to integrate Christian practices into our pedagogy will surely help to nurturing the spiritual development of children in the classroom.

In both the pre-seminar questionnaire and the first focus group discussion about Christian practices, it was clear that students had quite a narrow experience of Christian practices and were reluctant to incorporate them into their teaching. The results from the questionnaire showed that nine (n=9) out of fifteen students never pray with their class. Whilst this would be unthinkable in Public Schools in the United States of America, it is something that would have been common place in Northern Ireland's schools until quite recently. So as the culture changes how might Christian practices change, to reflect the new environment present in schools?

The material presented in the final seminar was designed to broaden out the discussion on Christian practices in the classroom and to challenge the students into thinking how they might integrate Christian practices within their own pedagogies. The response in the room was initially a bit cool, with the students struggling to see how this could help them to deliver more effective religious education or better nurture their pupils, by the end of the session the students had embraced the ideas and examples shared and were keen to explore them in more detail. One theme that was repeated a number of times in their discussions, was the importance of practicing the gift of time within teaching. It is best summed up by this comment:

AE: I think one way that you can practice charity in your classroom is by making sure you give pupils the gift of time. I have seen how easy it is to be dismissive when children want to tell you something but the teacher is too busy to listen. I hope I can be the kind of teacher who always takes time to listen.

Practicing the gift of time in a busy classroom is undoubtedly a real challenge but as the discussions unfolded the students began to see how practicing fellowship, liturgy and hospitality might help them turn their classrooms in gardens in which pupils had more time and space to grow, aiding their social, emotional and spiritual development.

The practice examined in the most detail and which generate a good degree of discussion, was hospitality. In delivering this material I was reminded of the importance of letting the Bible to speak for itself. As the students read over the short passages of text from the Gospels, I felt the temperature in the room change as they were confronted by the warmth and welcome of Jesus. As I listened in on the focus groups, the tone of their conversations indicated a willingness to offer hospitality and welcome to all.

When asked to consider their fears or uncertainties about practicing hospitality and welcoming strangers in their classrooms, many of the students were honest enough to acknowledge that it was difficult to practice hospitality with pupils exhibiting challenging

behaviours or really negative attitudes towards Christianity One student shared her heart with group:

AG: There is a severely autistic boy in my class this year and being honest there are some days I pray really hard that he won't come in. Clearly, I need to work on being more hospitable!

Whilst this comment was said partly in jest, it was clear from the wider discussions how challenging a place the classroom can be. In each of the three focus groups students discussed how negative attitudes towards Christianity impact on RE lessons, making it more difficult to teach than other subjects. One student described a situation in which a number of pupils had been openly defiant about engaging in a RE lesson.

RG: It is very hard to practice genuine hospitality towards pupils when they are so badly behaved in class. I had one class where they just sat and chanted the 'Bible is nonsense' the whole way through a lesson. Now my heart sinks when I see them coming through the door because I know they are always so dismissive of anything to do with Christianity.

In the post seminar questionnaire participants were asked to reflect on how Christian practices might help promote a more holistic approach to education. Six (n=6) students described how engaging in contemplative practices such as prayer or meditation within the classroom could be a means of nurturing emotional and spiritual health in pupils. Four (n=4) students talked about how the intentional practice of fellowship or community could be a useful way of building good relationships with their pupils. There was also a general sense in the responses to question 5a that students could see that religious education and education in general could be well served by the inclusion or integration of Christian practices. Five (n=5) students noted the importance of modelling behavior as a means of communicating the Gospel.

Three (n=3) students expressed concerns about any attempt to remove or water down the parts of the RE curriculum that deal with Christian practices and the decline in Collective Worship within schools. They were concerned that there could be a drift away from religious

education which focused on spiritual and faith formation, towards religious studies in which pupils learn about Christianity but never have the opportunity to engage in any Christian practices.

The practice that students indicated that they most wanted to develop or cultivate within their own practice, was fellowship or *koinonia*. Twelve (n=12) out of fifteen students gave this response to question 5b. Having spent a significant amount of time exploring the biblical practice of hospitality with the group, this result was a little disappointing. It may be that practicing fellowship or creating opportunities to express community within the classroom is something which felt more familiar or comfortable to them. Whereas practicing hospitality is more challenging, especially when it comes to considering how to balance tolerance with fidelity to God's word.

The two (n=2) students who indicated that they would like to focus on cultivating hospitality in their classrooms were both post primary students. It is impossible to say for certain but I wonder if there are higher levels of rejection amongst high school pupils, meaning those who teach this age group have to think more carefully about how to ensure their classroom is a welcoming environment. They may also be motivated by empathy wishing to support teenagers trying to find their place in the world at the same time that they themselves are trying to navigate emerging adulthood.

This final section of the thesis-project highlighted the need for religious education to be more than simply delivering the RE Curriculum. Christian teachers have a tremendous opportunity to embody the Gospel by incorporating Christian practices into their classroom practice, across a whole range of subjects. It was really encouraging to see the way in which the students embraced these new ideas and were open to integrating them into their pedagogy.

Outcome Six:

Propose that the assessed practice component of the new Certificate in Religious Education includes a requirement to incorporate a least one Christian practice into the lessons being delivered.

Outcome Seven:

Develop a framework for practicing hospitality in my year two module 'Learning in Diverse Classrooms', in order to assess the impact on student learning and model the integration of a Christian practice in my own teaching.

Mapping the Future

A great deal of learning has taken place during the course of this thesis-project, both for the researcher and the participants. The information gathered concerning the views of emerging generation Christian students at Stranmillis will be invaluable as the University College seeks to develop a new Certificate in Religious Education.

Until this point the discussions taking place between St. Mary's and Stranmillis have focused on how to ensure any new Certificate being offered at Stranmillis will fulfil the requirements from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in relation to the employment teachers. As such the work undertaken to date has focused on how to deliver the content of the St. Mary's Certificate (Appendix 3) at Stranmillis. There is now the opportunity to take the findings of this research and feed them into the future design of the course and in addition consider the broader implications for the development of Christian teaching and learning at Stranmillis.

As the future unfolds, it is really important that faculty and the church representatives being consulted about the future of the RE Certificate understand the particular challenges

facing young adults training to teach religious education in 2017. In mapping the future, it is absolutely vital that we recognize the ways in which the social, cultural and religious landscape of Northern Ireland has changed and develop training that will help student teachers excel in the delivery of religious education within the postmodern context of Northern Ireland.

Limitations

It had been hoped that by adopting a very broad title for the seminar series that students from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds would participate in the study. Sadly, this did not happen. There may have been a number of reasons for this. Catholic students interested in the topic may have felt that the material would be too similar to what they have or will cover in the existing Certificate in Religious Education. Very few Catholic students attend the Christian Union at Stranmillis. Although all students across the college were invited to participate in the research project, I was able to offer a personal invitation at two meetings of the Christian Union which I believe was significant in encouraging many of the students to participate. If a similar seminar series is to run in the future, it is hoped that students from a Catholic background would also participate. Within the wider context of teacher training in Northern Ireland it is hoped that the new Certificate in Religious Education will appeal to both Protestant and Catholic students, hopefully removing the need for a separate course.

Another limitation of the study relating to the composition of the group is that they all appeared to be what Smith labels committed traditionalists. All are actively involved in a local church, exhibit a high level of personal commitment to their faith and are able to articulate moral reasoning based on scripture. It would have been fascinating from a research point of view to examine the views of a wider group of students. However, once it became clear that the research was going to be conducted using an interpretivist paradigm requiring a high level of

personal engagement and commitment to the process, it was always more likely to involve committed Christians than those in the other categories. As a new faculty member, I was particularly interested in thinking through the ministry implications related to my involvement in the training of all emerging generation student teachers at Stranmillis. As such, any future study into this area needs to consider views from a wider range of emerging adults studying at the college.

Summary

Seven outcomes have been identified as a result of carrying out this thesis-project and will be developed in Stranmillis University College over the next two years:

1. Ensure the new Certificate in Religious Education provides opportunities for student teachers to develop subject specific knowledge and engage in personal faith formation, so that they see completing the qualification as more than simply a passport to obtaining teaching posts in Catholic Maintained Schools.
2. Identify additional opportunities for students to explore the application of a Christian Worldview to their future role as teachers, possibly through the addition of an extra module in the new RE Certificate.
3. Develop the educational framework presented with a view to being able to present it to a wider audience, including churches and educational ministry organizations e.g. Scripture Union NI and Love for Life.
4. Continue my work with the CSSC Working Group on Ethos in the Controlled Sector but with a greater focus on Christian vocation.
5. Establish a mentoring programme in Stranmillis which will encourage Christian faculty and students to engage in practice focused discussions about Christian vocation.
6. Propose that the assessed practice component of the new Certificate in Religious Education includes a requirement to incorporate a least one Christian practice into the lessons being delivered.
7. Develop a framework for practicing hospitality in my year two module 'Learning in Diverse Classrooms', in order to assess the impact on student learning and model the integration of a Christian practice in my own teaching.

Initially the outcomes of this thesis-project were intended to inform the development of a new Certificate in Religious Education at Stranmillis. However, as the process unfolded it became clear that the outcomes would have much broader implications than originally envisaged. If Christian students are going to be more effectively trained as religious educators, then a variety of support including but not limited to a new Certificate in RE must be available to them during their time at Stranmillis.

Conclusion

Delivering religious education requires teachers to know their subject, have good theological understanding and the ability to bring the subject to life through the integration of Christian practices. With God's help, every Christian teacher must use the opportunities they have been given to share the Good News of Jesus in their classroom and ensure the RE Curriculum is delivered effectively. In doing so they will be integrating their faith and work, playing their part in the *mission dei* and passing the faith on to the next generation.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-8; Psalm 78)

This carries with it significant responsibility and it is my prayer as a Christian faculty member at Stranmillis, that I might be able to get alongside my younger brothers and sisters in Christ, helping and encouraging them as they train to fulfil their God given callings. I am confident that under the thoughtful leadership of our current Principal, Dr Heaslett, Stranmillis University College will continue to develop a culture in which Christian faith is nurtured amongst both staff and students, encouraging us all to live out our Christian vocation to the Glory of God.

APPENDIX 1
Northern Ireland Religious Education
Core Curriculum

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 1: THE REVELATION OF GOD

Pupils should develop an awareness, knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the key Christian teachings about God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), about Jesus Christ and about the Bible; and develop an ability to interpret and relate the Bible to life.

Scripture references are given as a guide to teachers and where references are given to one of the Gospels, parallel passages from other Gospels may be used.

God and the Bible

a. God's word.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

- Look at and explore the content and structure of the Bible.
- Appreciate that the Bible has different forms of literature.
- Become familiar with places where the Bible is used and treated with reverence.

b. Creation and Fall.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

- Explore the wonder and variety of creation.
- Discover and reflect on the achievements of human creativity.
- Hear, discuss and reflect upon the biblical account of Creation and Fall (Genesis 1 to 3).

c. God's Covenant with his chosen people.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

- Explore the nature of covenant through Old Testament accounts of key figures, for example, *Abraham: Genesis 12: 1-5, Genesis 17: 1-9 and Moses: Exodus 3:1-10, Exodus 17: 1-16.*
- Listen to and discuss stories that reveal God's continuing care for human needs, concerns and troubles.

The Life of Jesus

d. God's Son.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

- Hear about concepts such as promise and prophecy - *Micah 5:2-5; Isaiah 7:14.*
- Be familiar with readings associated with the promised Messiah.
- Explore the chosen people's expectations and disappointment in relation to Jesus.

Explore the ways in which Christians believe Jesus is Saviour - *Isaiah 9:6-7*.

e. Birth and boyhood of Jesus.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Read, listen to and celebrate the Christmas story.

Read, listen to and retell the story of the boy Jesus in the Temple - *Luke 2:41-52*.

Reflect on the environment in which Jesus lived in contrast to their own.

f. The Ministry of Jesus.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Recall the story of the baptism of Jesus - *Luke 3:21-22*.

Begin to appreciate the significance of the call of the disciples.

Recall and reflect on stories where Jesus helped those in need - *Mark 2:1-12; Matt 8:1*

Discover, discuss and develop the effects and implications of Jesus' relationships

Study the teachings of Jesus through a selection of parables and central sayings especially from the Sermon on the Mount; and show their relevance for today *Luke 15; Matthew 5:1-12*.

g. Passion, death and resurrection.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Relate and discuss the events of the last days of Jesus' life, including:

The anointing - *John 12:1-8*.

Entry into Jerusalem - *John 12:12-19*.

Washing the disciples' feet - *John 13:1-17*.

The Last Supper - *Luke 22:7-20*.

Betrayal by Judas and arrest of Jesus - *Luke 22:47-53; Mark 14:10-11*.

Garden of Gethsemane - *Mark 14:32-42*.

Peter's denial - *Luke 22:54-62*.

Jesus' trial - *Mark 14:53-65 and 15:1-15*.

Crucifixion, death and burial - *Mark 15:16-47*.

Resurrection and appearances - *Mark 16; Luke 24:13-35*.

h. Ascension and Pentecost.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to: Recall and discuss the accounts of:

The Ascension - *Luke 24:50-53; The commission of the disciples - Matthew 28:16-20*. Pentecost - *Acts 2:1-13*.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2: THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Pupils should develop a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the growth of Christianity, of its worship, prayer and religious language; a growing awareness of the meaning of belonging to a Christian tradition, and sensitivity towards the beliefs of others.

a. Beginning and Growth.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Hear and explore accounts of how the followers of Jesus began to organise themselves in their new way of life - *Acts*.

Consider and retell what the apostles told others about Jesus.

b. The early Church to the present.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Investigate how Christianity came to Ireland.

Investigate the significance of some well-known Christians from different periods of history.

Consider an aspect of the development of their local Christian community.

c. Worship and Prayer.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Read prayers from the Bible, and other sources.

Recognise that prayer and worship can be associated with special events and places.

Reflect on and explore the belief that God may be worshipped anywhere.

Recognise that there are special places of worship which need to be respected.

Experience worship and prayer in a variety of ways.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3: MORALITY

Pupils should develop their ability to think and judge about morality, to relate Christian moral principles to personal and social life, and to identify values and attitudes that influence behaviour.

a. Respect for self.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Recognise that they are loved and respected as individuals.

Consider their growth and development in mind and body.

Appreciate the gift of sexuality.

Develop their own physical, spiritual, moral, emotional and social skills.

Further develop positive attitudes towards their talents, qualities and values.

Begin to recognise and accept their own limitations.

Be aware of the harmful effects of non-prescribed drugs and substances.

b. Respect for each other.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Explore and experience the values which help to build community.
Identify the various groupings to which they belong.
Be aware of and have respect for differing cultures and faiths.

c. Respect for God.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Discuss the application of the Ten Commandments to life today.
Explore how the Ten Commandments relate to the two commandments of Jesus.
Read and consider the values of God's Kingdom as revealed by Jesus in the Beatitudes
and consider their application today.

d. Respect for the environment.

Teachers should provide opportunities for pupils to:

Consider the respect due to creation, which is the gift of God.
Discover the challenge for humans to become co-workers with God for a better world.
Take responsibility for the care and preservation of the local environment.

APPENDIX 2
Pre-Seminar Questionnaire

1. Please tick the box to indicate which degree programme you are undertaking at Stranmillis?

- ☐ B.Ed. Primary
- ☐ B.Ed. Post Primary
- ☐ BSc HPAS
- ☐ BA ECS

2. What type of school did you attend?

- ☐ Integrated ☐ Maintained ☐ Voluntary ☐ Controlled
- ☐ Other _____

3. How important was faith, in your decision to become a teacher?

- ☐ Crucial ☐ Very Important ☐ Quite Important ☐ Not Important

4. Do you believe that a teacher's personal beliefs should be reflected in their teaching?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. How important is it that religious education is taught in schools?

- ☐ Crucial ☐ Very Important ☐ Quite Important ☐ Not Important
- ☐ Totally Inappropriate

6. How comfortable do you feel in relation to teaching religious education?

- ☐ Very Comfortable ☐ Comfortable ☐ Uncomfortable ☐ Very uncomfortable

7. How familiar are you with the Northern Ireland RE Curriculum?

- ☐ Very ☐ Quite ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not at all

8. How equipped do you feel to deliver religious education in school?

☐ Very ☐ Quite ☐ Somewhat ☐ Not at all

9. Would you / are you considering taking the Certificate in Religious Education?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please indicate your reasons

10. How important is it that pupils have the opportunity to participate in Christian worship in schools?

☐ Crucial ☐ Very Important ☐ Quite Important ☐ Not Important
☐ Totally Inappropriate

11. Do you believe it is your role as a teacher to communicate the gospel?

☐ Yes ☐ No

12. How often do you engage in each of the following Christian practices in your classroom?

A) Pray with pupils

☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

B) Read the Bible

☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

C) Talk about sin

☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

D) Talk about God

☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

E) Talk about Church

☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

F) Talk about your faith

☐ Often ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

13. What is the age of the pupils you normally teach?

☐ 4-7 ☐ 8-11 ☐ 11-14 ☐ 15-18

14. If you teach post primary aged pupils, what subjects do you teach?

Subjects:

15. Do you believe there are opportunities to integrate Christian teaching into your subject area?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please give an example:

16. How important is it to you that you teach in a school which has a Christian ethos?

☐ Crucial ☐ Very Important ☐ Quite Important ☐ Not Important

17. Have you ever received any teaching on Christian vocation in your church?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, where did this happen? E.G. Sermon, Youth Group, Bible Study, Discipleship / Mentoring programme

18. Do you think a course on Teaching and Christian Vocation should run annually in Stranmillis?

☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Rank these Christian values in order of importance in relation to your classroom practice?

Diligence
Forgiveness
Gentleness
Grace
Humility
Joy
Kindness
Love
Morality
Patience
Peace
Service
Wisdom

20. What do you believe is the greatest challenge facing Christian teachers in Northern Ireland today?

Comments:

APPENDIX 3

St. Mary's University College Certificate in Religious Education

Religious Education Certificate

St Mary's University College, supported by the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, exists to ensure that there will be an adequate supply of Catholic teachers competent to assist parents in educating their children according to the principles of Catholic education. To assist this, aim the College offers a Certificate in Religious Education. This programme may be taken in addition to the B.Ed. and PGCE courses.

The Certificate comprises three main elements:

Lectures which focus on key issues in biblical studies, theology and catechetics;

Tutorials which familiarise students with the RE programmes in use in schools and assist them with preparing teaching materials for the teaching of RE in schools;

And supervision and direction of students by members of the RE department during periods of school-based work.

The Certificate in Religious Education is an award of St Mary's University College and is validated by the Church Authority. All those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position in a maintained primary school will require this certificate or its equivalent.

APPENDIX 4

Glasgow University Online Certificate in Religious Education

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, skills and other attributes as described below.

Knowledge and Understanding:

- Demonstrate an informed understanding of selected themes in Catholic theology
- Show how Catholic theology informs the teaching of Religious Education in the Catholic School.
- Identify the link between theological formation and professional learning

Subject-specific/practical skills:

- Show how selected aspects of Catholic theological thinking are informed by critical engagement with Scripture;
- Identify how the relationship between faith and reason is essential to Catholic anthropology;
- Explain how both Christology and ecclesiology are intrinsic to effective teaching of RE in the Catholic school;
- Illustrate the role of sacraments and liturgy in Catholic RE
- Explain the principal features of Catholic moral teaching;
- Identify essential features of a Catholic educational system

Intellectual skills:

Awareness of the link between theological understanding and the teaching of Religious Education in Catholic schools;

Critical awareness of appropriate theological language in the teaching of Religious Education in Catholic schools;

Intellectual knowledge and thinking skills necessary to become an effective teacher of Religious Education in Catholic schools.

Understanding of the place of Scripture in Catholic theology

Understanding of the relationship between faith and reason is central to Catholic theological thinking

Identify how the person of Jesus Christ is portrayed in Scripture

Identify and explain the importance of the 'Church as communion' in contemporary

APPENDIX 5

Transcript of Q Commons Talk By Tim Keller, 'Why Culture Matters'.

"Why culture matters and what Christians should do about it. Number one, what is culture? What the Latin word culture meant was not to leave nature as it was but to make something of it. And for many, many years, actually centuries, culture always meant agriculture, horticulture. It meant not leaving nature as it was, not just eating whatever came up out of the ground, it meant actually tiling the ground and planting certain things and making something of the ground so we ate better. And so, for centuries, culture meant making something of the actual ground and the natural world but then by the 17th century, culture started getting a broader sense of the word and it began to mean educated. In the 17th century people said we shouldn't leave human beings just the way they are, we shouldn't leave human nature the way it is, we need to expose human beings to literature, philosophy and art and the idea of higher education and becoming a cultured being comes into being. But by the 20th century, the word culture began to be used in a comprehensive way and that is how I am going to use it today and how most people use it today.

Sociologists and anthropologists would say that culture is the shared beliefs and values and the shared conventions and social practices of a sub group or an entire society, in which we are taking all the raw material, everything in life and rearranging it in order to express meaning, in order to express what we think is the good, the true, the real and the important. So, everyone knows that when you think about culturing the land, you don't leave the ground as it is, you till it up and you plant and then you eat what comes. Well what is music? Class? Music is taking the raw material of sound and putting it together in such a way that it not only strikes the emotions but actually also becomes the glue for certain societies. In other words, music is taking the raw

material of noise, of sound as it were, and turning it into something, not leaving it just as it is but cultivating it. Or for example what are stories or theatre? It is taking the raw materials of human experience and fashioning that into narratives or anything that is a cultural artefact. Let me give you cultural artefacts, Art, obviously. Technology is a cultural artefact, you are taking something and making something new out of it, but by the way legal arguments, medial policies, all stories, a fictional story is taking raw materials and saying something about what I believe is real and important and true and good. And that is really what culture is. Culture is rearranging the material world...the raw materials, in order to say something or express meaning in some way. Now that is what culture is. James Hunter says that culture "is the power to define reality."

Point two. How do Christians understand culture? What is culture making when it comes to Christian thought? And the answer of course is that Christians believe that culture making is taking the raw material that God has made and there is potentials in that raw material and we are drawing the potentials out and rearranging the materials for human flourishing and human thriving, as God defines it. Now I will get back to that in a second, as God defines it.

But now biblically culture making is something that biblically is a good thing. Adam and Eve are put into the garden as what? Gardeners. And by the way, all culture making is basically a form of gardening. When you create music, you are taking the raw material and making it into music. When you create a story, when you are creating anything you are taking the raw material and same thing as a gardener, you are taking the raw material and you are tilling it and your cultivating it, fertilising it and that sort of thing. The original people, Adam and Eve were gardeners and that means they made culture. But if you see as soon as Adam and Eve pass off the scene in Genesis Chapter 4, you will see people making culture. You will see art and technology, except of course it is violent culture because it is culture not under the influence of God but under the influence of self. Not under the influence of love but of power but of course

even later on in the book, the Bible, we know that culture making tends to be something that he made human beings to do and often that culture is destructive, yet God doesn't just raise up his people to be prophets and priests. Who is Daniel? Who is Joseph? Who is Esther? These are people that God raised up and gave them so called secular jobs. They brought justice and wholeness into a secular field. And so, the Bible indicates that culture making is good.

But let's get back to what I said I was going to get back to. Every single culture is basically the rearranging of material in such a way that we express the meaning of things, every culture is pointing to values. Every culture is saying this is what's good, this is what's true, this what's real, this is what's beautiful, this is what's important. And when I say Christians are supposed to make culture, we are supposed to make culture, we are supposed to rearrange things for human flourishing and by the way everybody says that. I think I heard Gabe already say that. We are here for the common good. That is a loaded term. That is a value laden term. When anybody says I want to work for the common good, you need to know that they have a working definition of common good that is based on all sorts of underlying beliefs about what human beings are for. Why we are here? Where we are going? What is important to for human beings to live for? And therefore, we don't agree on what human flourishing is. We don't agree on what the good is. So, for example I told you, I gave you eight examples of cultural artefacts, so for example art or technology, creating an organisation or writing a philosophy paper or a story or eh an ad. Every ad is a cultural artefact. Every legal argument, every medical policy why? Because let me give you nine examples of different cultural understandings of what is good.

Some cultures and some cultural artefacts say individual choice and self-expression is more important than supporting the group or community standard. It's more important that the individual be happy, than you support community standards. Other cultures and culture artefacts say it is the other way around. The importance is that the individual sublimates his or her self-

interests for the good of the family. Which is it? Two different views of good. Or secondly, some cultural artefacts tell us that the material world is good. Some cultures say the material world is an illusion. Other cultures say that the material world is the only reality. Which is it? And I want you to know that all cultural artefacts are assuming one of those views. Or thirdly, is sex dangerous and a necessary evil or is it only for family or community or is it a form of self-expression. Is money basically a way to get your family up in the world, or is it a mode of self-esteem? Let me put this in the form of questions...Is society basically an aggregation of individuals or of families or tribes? In other words what is the basic building block of society? Differing answers, differing cultures. And medicine, law, ads, arts, everything is different. Or is history basically moving in the direction of progress when things are getting better and better or are things getting worse and worse? And we have come down from some golden age or is history a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing? Or is it cyclical? Which is it? See, different cultures believe different things about history and it comes down, out in all the cultural products. Or emm...is morality self-authorizing? Basically, does the individual decide what is right or wrong? Or is morality, moral values embedded somehow in the cosmos of the universe and it is our job to discover them and somehow align ourselves with them? Is human reason sufficient to answer all questions, ultimately or is it not? And therefore, we have to depend on revelation from God or from tradition or something like that. You see, our understanding of time, art, government, rationality vs intuition and experience, all these things, which is most important?

Every culture is coming down somewhere and every cultural artefact is coming down somewhere. Because culture is rearranging the raw materials of life, everything from clothing to food. Everything from law to medicine, from art to philosophy. Everything is being rearrange in order to express meaning and to say this is good, this is true, this is beautiful and this is not. And

I just gave you something like thirty or forty different views of different things that are underlying values and beliefs underneath every single culture and every cultural artefact.

Christian culture making is just like any other culture making, except Christians try to discern what is God's view of the relationship between the individual and the community? What is god's view of the family? What is god's view of sex and money and power? What is God's understanding of history or rationality? What is God's understanding of identity? What is God's understanding of society? What is God's understanding of morality? And then by getting that deep into our hearts and psyche you just go out in the world and do what everyone else does. Which is, you make culture. Because if you work you make culture. If you do anything pretty much you make culture. That is point two. Point one is what is culture making? Point two, what is Christian culture making? It's pretty much the same thing, except Christians understand that there are very different views of the common good and we are seeking to help all human beings thrive, not just us. Not just us Christians. But we are doing, we are seeking it necessarily in light of the good that God gives us.

Point three and this is the shortest point by far. Should Christians therefore engage culture? Should Christians try to make culture? Should Christians think that culture making matters and that we should try to do it? And I think you now know what the answer is, unavoidably Christians will be making culture. The real point, question is, are you just going to go with the flow? Are you just going to be doing what everyone else does? Are you essentially going to be creating culture that is based on none Christian understanding of the good of society of history, of identity of morality or are you going to be really, really thoughtful about it? And actually, let your culture making be influenced by your faith. So, the question is not will Christians make culture, the question is of course is, will they do it well or not? See that was a short point.

Point Four - what is the way forward then? If it is unavoidable and I think as you can understand I am implying that most Christians are not thoughtful about it. In fact one of the things that is frightening to me, is that if I go down that list and I say Christianity has a different account of every one of the things I just said, eh...by comparison with secularism, western secularism individualism and also Christianity is very different than traditional eh...more hierarchal...and communal cultures. Christianity is rather unique and different most people gulp because they are just out there working and not really thinking. So, point four is how we can move forward?

Here are four ideas. First of all, I think it is very important to start with that Christians get a nuanced understanding of all culture and cultural artefacts. Now I think I can do this quickly. This might leave some questions in your mind, nevertheless I will try do it the best I can. Every single culture has got and every human being is made in the image of God and is fallen. Christians and non-Christians. Every human being is made in the image of God and the Bible says in Romans 1 that we all have some kind of inherent, innate sense of God's reality. Even those of us who don't know if we even believe in God, according to Romans 1 every human being is made in the image of God, we have some innate goodness and knowledge of truth and reality but at the same time we are all fallen. So even non-Christians are made in the image of God and Christians are made in the image of God and even Christians are fallen and sinful. And what that means is that when those Christians and non-Christians make culture, the cultural artefacts are always mixed. Eh...Romans Chapter 1, this is a very famous verse, it says this about, well...verse 20. "Since the beginning of the world, God's invisible qualities have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made so men are without excuse" but the words being understood and are seen as present passive participles in the Greek. And what that means is that every human being, even people who don't believe in God as they are making culture, it essentially says that there is a

continually fresh insistent pressure on all human beings on their consciousness about the reality of God. And therefore, lots and lots of non-Christians create cultural artefacts that you can tell if you know your Bible, are pointing towards Biblical truth. Are pointing to some of these realities. Meanwhile every Christian who tries to make culture, to some degree because of our sin will be distorted. Because the idols of our hearts, because we love money too much, we love career too much, or we love our own culture, our own white culture or African American culture too much. In other words, because of the idols of our hearts, our culture artefacts will always be imperfect and non-Christians cultural artefacts will always have something good in them and to have that nuanced approach to culture is crucial to Christians. You have got to be able to appreciate what is good in everything, and you have got to be non triumphalistic about what you produce. Crucial. Critical. Number one.

Number two. The second thing is you probably need to blend the insights of the main parties that you are going to read about if you are a Christian and you read about Christ and culture. There is the 'worldview transformations party' that tends to be confronting of the culture. Saying we have the Christian worldview and you don't. There is the 'justice common good party', that says we just got to get out there and love people and care for the poor. And there is the 'just build up the church party', that the important thing is that you build up the church and don't get too distracted with culture making. You got to build the church up and worship and gather and we do that. And all three of those by the way, all three of those views have a lot to say. An extreme version of anyone of the three, leads to being over confrontational, or over assimilationist, or overly withdrawn. But all three have got something important and you need to blend them all together.

Thirdly, our cultural products as Christians need to defy and resonate with the culture. Not only resonate because then your just giving in. Not only defy because no-one will listen to you.

You got to do both. And you know when Frederick Nietzsche says and he argues constantly, that great philosopher, "That if you believe in human rights and if you believe you need to care for the poor and the equality of every human being. He says then whether you know it or not you are a Christian. You may say that you don't believe in God but you are a Christian. If there is no God and the universe is impersonal and we all got here just be eating one another, the strong eating the weak. It is just crazy to think the if we are just the product of evolution, that we should love one another. One Russian philosopher said, this is the way a lot of secular people reason..." man descended from apes, therefore let us love one another." And Nietzsche says there can be a God, if there is no God then human rights don't work. But most people are going to say human rights do work and therefore you can say you've got something that I resonate with, I believe in human rights too here is where it comes from.

One last thing... We can make culture because God has made the world to be remade by culture makers. Mark Knoll in his book 'Scandal of the Evangelical Mind' puts it like this, "Who formed the world of nature that provides the raw material for physical sciences? Who formed the universe of human interaction, which is the raw material of politics, economics, sociology and history? Who formed the source of all harmony, form and narrative pattern that is the raw material for art? Who is the source of the human mind, which is the raw material for philosophy and psychology? And who moment by moment, maintains the connection between our minds and the world beyond our minds? God did. God does. Christianity gives us the reason why culture making works and a motivation to do it. Thank you."

APPENDIX 6

Character and Competence Bible Study Tool

Joseph – Lessons from Egypt

Genesis 37:2-36; 39:1-20; 39:20-4:23; 41:1-57; 42:7, 9, 14, 16; 44:3-5; 45:1-8; 47:13-26.

CHARACTER	COMPETENCE

Daniel – Lessons from Babylon

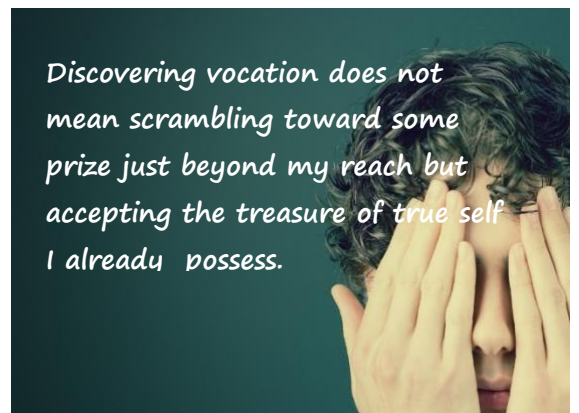
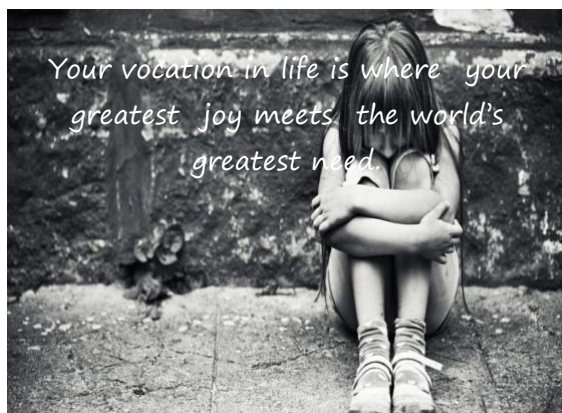
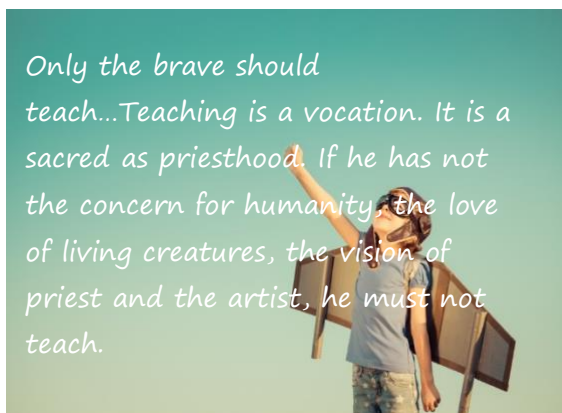
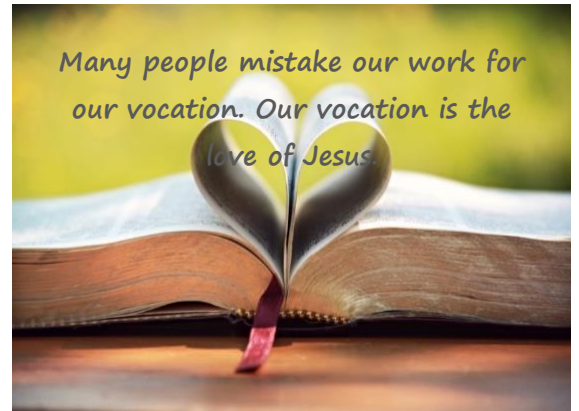
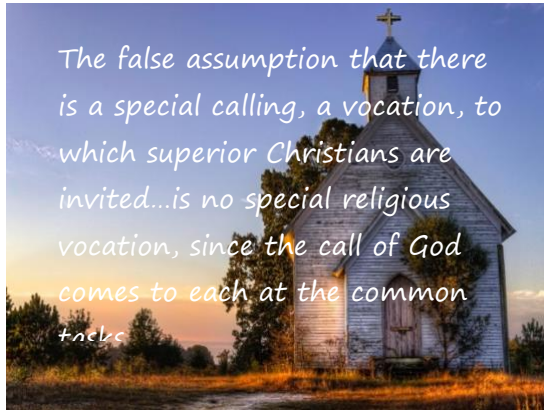
Daniel 1:11-14, 20; 2:24; 2:47; 2:48; 3:16-18; 4:27; 4:33; 5:14; 5:17; 6:3-4, 10, 16, 25-28; 7:21;

9:3-4; 12:1, 12-13.

CHARACTER	COMPETENCE

APPENDIX 7

Vocational Quotes Exercise



APPENDIX 8
Post-Seminar Questionnaire

1. Religious Education in Northern Ireland schools

- a) As a Christian student teacher, which elements of the RE curriculum do you consider to be the most important?
- b) Do you believe the legal status of collective worship within Northern Ireland schools is a help or a hindrance in advancing the Gospel?

2. Biblical Worldview and Teaching

- a) How important is it for teachers involved in the delivery of RE in Northern Irish schools to have knowledge and understanding of a Christian worldview? Circle your answer.

- 1. Essential
- 2. Very Important
- 3. Quite Important
- 4. Not Important
- 5. Unsure

- b) Within the educational framework presented, which element of the biblical worldview or narrative resonates most strongly with how you understand your role as a teacher?

3. The Cultural Mandate and Christian Vocation

- a) In light of Genesis 1-3, how do you understand your work as a teacher?
- b) Describe one way in which teaching contributes to the *missio dei*?

4. The Bible and Teaching

- a) Developing Christian character is important, if student teachers are to model Christ, as well as teaching about Him in RE. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul says, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control". Which fruit of the spirit do you most need to develop in terms of your Christian character and how will doing so impact your teaching?

- b) Daniel stood firm within a secular culture. How does his example help as you think about the challenges Christian teachers face in an increasingly secular and pluralistic Northern Ireland?
- c) Teaching has been described as 'Gardening'. What is your role as an RE teacher in relation to the faith development of your pupils?

5. Teaching and Christian Practices

- a) If education is more than simply the transmission of knowledge, how might the use of Christian practices within the classroom help promote a more holistic approach to education?
- b) Which Christian practice would you most like to cultivate or develop within your own classroom practice?
- c) As a Christian teacher, what challenges might present themselves as you seek to practice hospitality towards people and ideas in school?

APPENDIX 9

Seminar Evaluation Form

Course Name	Teaching and Christian Vocation
Course Tutor	Barbara McDade

1. What did you most enjoy about the course?
2. Outline two key areas of learning you gained from the course:
 - i)
 - ii)
3. How would you rate the structure of the course?
 - i) Very Good
 - ii) Good
 - iii) OK
 - iv) Poor
 - v) Very Poor
4. What one thing would you change about the course?
5. Please add any general comments you would like to make about the course:

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VITA

Full Name:	Barbara McDade
Date and Place of Birth:	1974 Bangor Co. Down
Education/ Degrees:	University of St. Andrews MA Hons; University of Oxford PGCE; University of Gloucester MA.
Years of D.Min. work:	2014-present
Expected Graduation:	May 2018